

Youth in the Maldives:

*Shaping a New Future
for Young Women and Men Through
Engagement & Empowerment*



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PREFACE

This report, which examines challenges facing youth in the Maldives, as well as opportunities for their development, was a collaborative effort between the World Bank and the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

A World Bank team comprising Piotr Pawlak, Parthapriya Ghosh, Jana El-Horr, Dustin Smith and Maria Correia, prepared this report. Maria-Beatriz Orlando at the World Bank, Washington D.C., was instrumental in sharing her experiences in working with gender and youth issues. Special thanks are extended to Somil Nagpal (Senior Health Specialist), Harsha Aturupane (Lead Education Specialist), Mari Shojo (Education Specialist), and Aminath Inasha Shafeeq (Operations Analyst), for their operational support through the country-missions and collection of qualitative data. We are also indebted to Natasha Leite, Independent Consultant for UNICEF, who shared invaluable insights about youth in the Maldives. Our recognition and gratitude goes to all who have contributed to this report by sharing country-specific data, reports and publications, program and policy examples and other research materials relevant to the topic of youth and gender in the Maldives. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the young women and young men in the Maldives who were interviewed for this report.

ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARROW	Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women
AUSAid	Australian Agency for International Development
BBS	Biological and Behavioral Survey
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DRP	Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party
FGD	Focus-Group Discussion
FPU	Family Protection Unit
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IGMH	Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
JJU	Juvenile Justice Unit
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDHS	Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey
MIC	Middle-income Country
MOE	Ministry of Education (Maldives)
MPND	Ministry of Planning and National Development (Maldives)
NER	Net Enrollment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NYP	National Youth Policy
SAGE	South Asia Gender Initiative
SEN	Special Education Needs
SRGBV	School-related Gender-based Violence
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
DAW	United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO Bangkok	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report responds to the growing concern over issues facing Maldivian youth today, and specifically, to a request made by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to examine the status of youth in the Maldives. Such concerns are certainly warranted, particularly in light of a regional youth bulge which is taking place in South Asia, as well as an observed increase in at risk behavior such as youth drug use and membership in gangs. While a number of studies have sought to examine youth issues in the Maldives, a comprehensive and holistic assessment is lacking. This report was aimed at helping to fill this knowledge gap.

This report examines issues affecting young people in the Maldives as they transition from adolescence to adulthood, and based on this analysis and a review of international good practice, recommends a number of actions for the Government's consideration. The analysis focused on youth experiences as they pertain to: health, education, labor, family structure, gangs and violence, and civic engagement and participation.

A youth development framework, based on public health literature and adapted to the Maldives, serves as the organizing structure of the report. The report draws on original data collection and analysis, as well as an extensive review of existing literature. With regard to data collection, the study involved field-based research including a household survey and in-depth interviews, and focus-group discussions with youth and stakeholders in the Maldives.

Conceptual Framework

For the purposes of this study, 'youth' is defined as spanning the adolescent period between 10 to 24 years of age. Youth or adolescent development thus refers to the physical, social, and emotional processes of maturation that occur during the 10 to 24 year age period. The adolescent period represents the transition from childhood to adulthood, with biological processes driving the initiation of adolescence and societal factors largely determining the initiation of adulthood.

This study broadly applied an 'ecological' framework in analyzing youth issues. An ecological framework considers the relationship between the individual adolescent and her or his environment. In utilizing the ecological framework, the report seeks to highlight the risks and challenges that affect the wellbeing of youth, as well as their ability to realize their potential as fully productive citizens in Maldivian society.

Key Findings

Youth are tomorrow's adults – the future of the Maldives hinges on the youth of today. Currently, young Maldivians feel disenfranchised and excluded, and are perceived as idle and disconnected from the fabric of society. This problem is not limited to one or two at-risk groups, as was originally thought when this study originated. While a small group of youth are employed and thriving economically and socially, a large proportion of the young population are confronted by significant challenges, which often play out differently for young women and men. Globalization, internet access, higher levels of education, economic growth over the decades, and a stream of tourists and foreigners in the country, has exposed young women and men to the outside world and new ideas and values, making them acutely aware of what they can aspire to. Yet, both female and male youth face the shackles of the limited island economy, lack empowerment and community engagement, and contend with rigid norms of behavior and increasingly conservative values, as well as an inadequate education and training system that ill prepares them for the labor market. In many cases, Maldivian youth also face limited spatial mobility. These circumstances dash their expectations and hopes for a different and better life.

Many of the challenges facing young Maldivians discussed in this report – lack of access to reproductive and sexual health services, poor educational quality, unemployment and underemployment, and crime and violence – are *not* uncommon in developing and many developed countries. Yet, the findings of this report highlight several challenges that are particularly pronounced for Maldivian youth:

- ***Thwarted expectations.*** Despite the spatial isolation of many Maldivians, youth today are better educated and better connected to the outside world than ever before. Social media is exposing young people to new ideas and values; the country's graduation to middle-income status also means that young people now aspire to more expensive lifestyles and higher social status. However, norms and perceptions among parents and communities have limited the goals that youth may aspire for, leaving young people disappointed and disengaged.
- ***Physical isolation.*** The youth population is geographically dispersed. Over a quarter of the national population resides in Malé, while some 200 other islands have less than 1,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, the physical isolation has added to the disconnect between Malé and the rest of the islands, leading to a limited trickling down of information and services. As a consequence, Maldives faces high costs of transportation, and citizens experience difficulties in mobility and in accessing public services, thereby limiting opportunities, particularly for women. As such, another negative effect of this geographic isolation is that men must often leave the atolls to seek out employment opportunities, causing married couples to be separated for long periods.
- ***Labor market constraints.*** Youth unemployment is pronounced in the Maldives, particularly for women, but it is unclear whether the problem is one of demand or supply. Young people lack the socio-emotional and other required skills in the job market, and schools are not equipping youth with these essential skillsets, nor with sufficient career guidance. Simultaneously, the reservation wage appears to be high- young people have high

or unrealistic expectations in terms of what constitutes an acceptable job. Added to this reality are the perceptions and expectations of parents with regard to what is an acceptable job and wage for their children, leading to limited support and encouragement for youth to be economically active. This in turn has created a national phenomenon which is referred to as “youth voluntary unemployment.” In the atolls specifically, many young women are keen to work and earn a livelihood but lack opportunities due to cultural norms. In addition to fishing, many men also work in resorts, although they often aspire to new types of employment.

- ***Health care system fails to meet the needs of youth.*** The health care system of the Maldives fails to meet many of the needs of youth due to several key reasons. First, health care is curative rather than preventative; and second, the subject of sexual and reproductive health among youth, particularly unmarried youth, remains taboo and sensitive.
- ***Stresses on families and family breakdown.*** Divorce rates in the Maldives are relatively high, as is the proportion of female-headed households. One problem is that Maldivian youth are often ill prepared for the duties and responsibilities of parenthood even though social norms place a significant emphasis on childbearing – a marker of adulthood for women. Lack of suitable housing in urban spaces, and unemployment or underemployment, places further stresses on families. Family issues and breakdown, in addition to other factors, are connected to youth gang membership.
- ***Gang participation and violence is a relatively new phenomenon but has been on the rise.*** Youth are joining gangs for a variety of reasons, including inactivity and apathy, unemployment, drug use, the need to belong and form brotherhood, and the need for young men to prove their masculinity. Moreover, high levels of domestic violence, divorce and broken homes have led young people to look outside of traditional family structures for the support and protection that gangs can provide. A further problem is that people with drug or criminal offenses experience difficulties in reintegrating into society and finding jobs; access to counseling and rehabilitation services, especially for young people, is limited and inadequate. As such, young people with criminal histories are often left with few alternative options and reengage in gang activity.

The report revealed the following risk and protective factors that influence the development of Maldivian youth as they transition into adulthood:

- **Family.** Family and relationships are especially important for youth in the Maldives as they provide customary and financial support. Conversely, lack of adult encouragement and support to continue education and search for employment, parental displays of negative attitudes and behaviors including physical and emotional abuse by family members, the absence of parental guidance, and high rates of divorce and family breakup negatively impact youth and their development.
- **Schools.** Engagement in schools protects youth against a number of negative behaviors, including drug and alcohol use, and engaging in violence and unsafe sexual practices.

Unfortunately, when schools do not provide quality services, or do not foster a healthy environment for youth – because they expose them to rigid, violent, and gender inequitable attitudes and behavior, corporal punishment, bullying, discrimination, harassment and other forms of violence – not only is their development hindered, but they are more likely to engage in negative behaviors.

- **Health.** The health sector can play a significant role in achieving positive outcomes for youth development. However, as the number of young people entering their reproductive years in the country is on the rise, youth perpetually lack access to quality services, particularly in regard to sexual and reproductive health, and adolescents and youth are not provided with sufficient knowledge about preventative health, which places their health at risk. As rates of drug use amongst Maldivian youth continue to rise, the nation also faces challenges in providing sufficient and appropriate rehabilitation and support services to these individuals.
- **Gender Norms.** While Maldives ranks relatively high in education and health, it scores poorly in political empowerment and economic opportunity for women, and high levels of gender-based violence are prevalent. In recent years, gender inequality appears to have worsened in the Maldives, and civil society groups have reported significantly increasing restrictions on women’s dress, mobility, autonomy, forms of employment, voice and ability to make independent decisions.

In light of the challenges facing Maldivian youth, as well as the key factors which strongly impact their development, it is evident that action must be taken in order to not only secure their well-being, but also to ensure their full development into adulthood. As the nation’s single largest demographic today, these youth will be the nation’s leaders of tomorrow.

Moving Forward – Shaping a New Future for Young Women and Men in the Maldives

Addressing the needs of youth, and enabling them to fully participate as productive citizens in Maldivian society will require a broad strategy of youth empowerment, whereby youth are not only positively perceived and valued at all levels of society, but will truly be able to exercise a marked degree of agency, making decisions and espousing change in their lives, their communities, and their nation. Based upon the findings of the report, the following key actions are recommended:

1. ***Conducting a national youth campaign.*** Such a campaign will effectively communicate to youth that the Government of Maldives, parents, and communities are committed to engage with them, and that they also need the full participation of youth in society to ensure a future for the country. Such a campaign will not only highlight the actual challenges faced by youth, but will positively shift perceptions of youth in society, encourage parents and communities to support social and economic engagement with youth, and will serve more broadly as a platform to launch coordinated youth programming in the country.
2. ***Developing new spaces for youth programming and participation.*** “New spaces” does not necessarily refer to physical spaces, but rather to venues in which youth can assemble

and build community, discuss the issues facing them, access important information, and build networks and skills. Pre-existing youth centers or other structures may be utilized in order to provide skills training, public health education and support, civic education and leadership opportunities, amongst other amenities.

3. ***Supporting preventative health care for young women and men.*** In addition to working towards a broader transition to the use of a preventative healthcare model in Maldives, the role of health workers should be considered as a means to improve the provision of youth friendly health care services. As Maldivian youth face a dearth of information in the area of sexual and reproductive health, social media should be utilized in order to bridge such knowledge gaps, as well as to shift societal norms vis-a-vis sexual and reproductive health services for young people. Social media may additionally be used to reduce the stigma associated with accessing psychological health services.
4. ***Preparing young people for jobs.*** While little is currently understood about labor markets and the reasons for high employment among youth, conducting a rapid and low-cost Training PLUS program will enable the Government of Maldives to develop and deliver a short term training program to equip youth with the skills needed to enter the labor force, as well as to widen their range of opportunities through establishing links, networks and internships for gainful employment. In order to additionally strengthen the school to work transition, curriculums and textbooks should be reassessed in order to align graduates' skills with labor market needs, and after school programs should be expanded to further prepare students for the labor market.
5. ***Implementing 'Youth Score Cards' in schools.*** As evidenced by international experiences, youth score cards should be piloted through the World Bank's *Enhancing Education Development in the Maldives Project*, as this low-cost intervention is an effective way to engage young people in areas which are important to them, including schools. Youth Score Cards enable young people and their parents to monitor the quality of local schools, and to additionally foster accountability on behalf of school management.

In confronting the challenges facing youth, the Government of Maldives needs to address the dearth of data, including gender-disaggregated data, which exists on youth. More importantly, impact evaluations and assessments must be included in the design and implementation of future policies and programs, especially given the numerous short-lived youth initiatives that have been ineffective, but not evaluated. Finally, international experiences suggest that the needs of youth are best met through inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration, as well as with public-private sector involvement. These should be key considerations as the Government moves forward in tackling youth issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

A youth bulge is currently unveiling across South Asia. In the case of the Maldives, as of 2012, nearly half of the population was under the age of 25.¹ In coming years, these youth will transition into adulthood and assume the associated roles and responsibilities as parents, community members and leaders.

For most youth worldwide, the critical transition period from childhood to young adulthood is delicate and challenging, and hinges on adequate support and guidance from family, schools, and society at large.² When the needs of youth go unaddressed, particularly in countries that are experiencing youth bulges, vulnerability to economic distress increases, which can lead to social unrest.

There is a growing concern among the public and policy makers over the situation of young Maldivian women and men today. The Government of Maldives has recognized that their youth are at risk of becoming unproductive citizens, and identified youth as a sector needing special attention. While youth would legally be adults from the age of 18 in most countries, many young people in the Maldives are denied passage into adulthood due to labor market constraints, lack of participation in decision-making processes, constraints to ownership of property and goods, and a lack of status and a role in society.

While there has been debate and discussion on the challenges Maldivian youth face, relatively little has been done to gain an understanding of the nature of their problems, the underlying causes of youth risks and behaviors, and the corollary policies and programs required to address the issues. Aside from UNESCO's assistance to the Government of Maldives in preparing the National Youth Policy in 1984, and some work carried out recently by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on gender, there has been limited analysis of youth issues in the Maldives.

Recognizing the importance of youth as the pillars of the future and the need for an improved empirical basis for youth programs, the Government of the Maldives requested the World Bank's assistance to better understand the nature of youth issues and to identify what must be done to improve conditions for youth. This report is a response to that request.

¹ Department of National Planning. 2012. "Statistical Yearbook of Maldives - 2012." Malé: Department of National Planning, Government of the Maldives.

² Feldman, S., and G. Elliot. 1997. "At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

OBJECTIVES, AUDIENCE AND DATA SOURCES

Objectives

This report examines issues affecting young people in the Maldives as they transition from adolescence to adulthood, and based on this analysis and a review of international good practices, recommends actions to address these issues. The analysis focuses on youth experiences as they pertain to: health, education, labor, family structure, gangs and violence, and civic engagement and participation.

For the purpose of this report, ‘youth’ in the Maldives is defined as people between 15 and 24 years of age, a definition that is consistent with that of the UN. Although this definition differs from the official one used by the Government of Maldives, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Government of Maldives has endorsed this definition for the purpose of this report.³

Audience

This audience for this report includes: (a) Maldivian government officials tasked with the development of youth policies, programs, services and activities; (b) donor agencies and other development agencies working with youth in the Maldives; and (c) local and international non-governmental (NGO) and community-based organizations (CBO) working on youth and related issues.

Methodology and Data Sources

A youth development framework, based on public health literature and adapted to the Maldives, serves as the organizing structure to the report. The report draws on both original data collection and analysis and a review of existing literature and secondary data sources. With regard to the former, the study involved field-based research, including a household survey, in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions with youth and stakeholders in the Maldives, as follows:

- (a) A *Survey* was conducted in: (a) urban Malé and Addu City; and (b) four other cities in three respective atolls including Gan and Fonadhoo in Laam atoll, Kulhuduffushi in Haa Dhaalu atoll, and Hanimaadhoo in Haa Dhaalu atoll. A total of 1,003 individuals (520 females and 483 males) participated in a survey, of which 402 were youth, ages 15-24 years (161 males and 241 females). The survey sought to determine gender, age, living situation, education, employment (including type, sector, level and source of income), and family situation including marital status and number of children.
- (b) *Focus-group discussions* with a total of 97 youth (47 male and 50 female) in the 15-35 age category in four locations including Malé, Malé atoll, Mahibadhoo, Alif Dhaal atoll, Maalhos, Alif Alif atoll, and Dharavandoo, Baa atoll. The objective was to explore youth perceptions and attitudes around themes such as their roles and

³ In accordance with the Youth Policy, 2003, the Ministry of Youth and Sports defines youth as individuals in the age range of 18-35 years.

responsibilities; opportunities and challenges in daily life; family life and the transition to adulthood; practices, beliefs and attitudes related to gender roles and gender equality; youth culture and tradition; and employment opportunities and challenges related to the transition from school to work.

The report draws extensively from the existing secondary data sources as follows:

- *1999*, Reproductive Health Baseline Survey which surveyed 2,254 households and included 4,087 household respondents.
- *2004*, Reproductive Health Baseline Survey which surveyed some 16,078 people living in 2,279 households from 20 islands. A total of 4,102 respondents from 2,279 households were interviewed. In addition, 1,141 young men and women ages 15 to 24 also participated (663 unmarried young women and 469 unmarried young men, ages 15-24) nationwide.
- *2005*, UNFPA's Youth Voices – Facts, Figures and Opinions survey was administered to 4,002 youth and 700 adults from all regions of the country. Youth-led discussions in 21 islands were held with 84 groups of Maldivian youth (ages 15- 24) and adults (ages 25 and up), and island administration, with 1,200 people contributing to the discussions.
- *2007*, Women's Health and Life Experiences Survey with a sample size of 2,584 households: 1,864 households in the atolls, 575 households in Malé and 145 households in the 3 additional tsunami affected islands. The sample size represents 6% of all households in the Maldives and 5% of the women population aged 15-49 in the Maldives.
- *2007*, the Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences included a cross-sectional population-based household survey of women aged 15-49 years. The study was conducted across the whole country, with the overall sample size of 2,582 households (1,862 households in the atolls, 575 households in Malé, and an additional 145 households in tsunami-affected islands). The sample size represented 6% of all households in Maldives and 5% of the female population aged 15-49 years.
- *2008*, the Global School-based Student Health Survey which was conducted by the Ministry of Education included 3,241 respondents (including 1,453 male respondents and 1,752 female respondents) completed in 39 schools. 38.6% of respondents were 16 years old and older, 60% of respondents were 13 to 15 years old, and 1.4% of respondents were 12 years old or younger. 37.1% were attending Grade 8, 33.5% were in Grade 9 and 29.3% were in Grade 10.
- *2008*, Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS which surveyed 605 young men and women aged 15-24 years (460 youth in Malé and 145 in Laamu).
- *2009*, UNICEF study, which involved 17,035 people in 2,500 households, and 2,000 children in Maldivian schools.
- *2009*, Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey, which included interviews with 8,362 ever-married women and 1,727 ever-married men, ages 15-64. A total of 2,240 never-married women and men age 15-24 completed individual interviews.
- *2011-2012*, National Drug Use Survey, conducted in 39 selected islands and more than 3,500 households. From those households, 13,172 screening questionnaires were completed for individuals aged 15-64 years, and of these, approximately 74% (10,172

individuals) were screened, comprised of 6,334 females and 3,838 males. Additionally, a total of 27 FGDs were conducted in Malé and in the atolls with drug users, rehabilitation personnel, counsellors at NDA and DRC, NGOs and CBOs, adolescent males and females and key stakeholders.

- *2011*, Prison Assessment and Proposed Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders Report conducted by the Government of Maldives and the United Nations Development Programme (2011) administered a questionnaire to 576 incarcerated male and female offenders in the Maldives (aged between 18-75, with 95% of respondents being male, age 30 years or under).
- *2012*, Rapid Situation Assessment of Gangs in Malé, included FGDs with gang members or members of groups labeled as gangs. The assessment had a total of 131 participants; 24 in-depth interviews with gang members or people labeled as gang members were carried out.

Other data sources are described in Annex 1.

Some of the field-based research carried out for this report was unusable because it was not disaggregated by age or gender; hence the report only draws on data that could be clearly attributed. Additionally, the field research did not cover key issues such as sexual and reproductive health. In light of such limitations, every effort was made to unearth other data sources and reports, including scholarly articles and peer-reviewed publications. These secondary information sources focused on the following issues: youth civil and socio-political participation, engagement and inclusion, family dynamics, family structures and relationships, gender roles and norms, health and well-being, violence and risky behaviors, education and school-related challenges, and finally, employment and work force participation.

REPORT ROADMAP

Following this introductory *Section I*, this report is organized as follows:

- *Section II* presents conceptual definitions and a framework for analyzing youth in the Maldives; it also provides context for the report, including macroeconomic indicators, demographic information and an overview of the youth policy framework.
- *Section III* presents emerging concerns or issues in six areas: Health, Education, Employment, Family Structures and Relationships, Violence and Crime, and Civil and Socio-Political Engagement of Youth.
- *Section IV* provides conclusions and recommendations, highlighting ways to break the chain of events and influences that place Maldivian youth at risk.

2. FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT FOR ANALYZING YOUTH IN THE MALDIVES

DEFINITIONS

Youth

The literature on youth is replete with caution on the use of a chronological age to distinguish phases of the life cycle. The definition of youth depends on the sectoral and cultural context; for example, health specialists may refer to youth as the pubescent period, which begins at different ages in different countries, while labor ministries may use the minimum work age as the point at which the youth phase begins.

The term adolescence refers to the transition from childhood to adulthood. **Biological processes** drive the initiation of adolescence, its onset being defined by puberty.⁴ In contrast, **societal factors** largely determine the initiation of adulthood. It is possible that forced adulthood in adolescence or continuing adolescence beyond age 30 has negative impacts on development programming for youth. In a context where a man is still considered “young” in his 30s, it can be difficult to determine where initiatives focused on young people stop and general development starts. Similarly, where girls of 18 years have been married for some years and have their own children, it is easy to subsume them into adult reproductive health service programming and forget that they still face issues related to adolescence.⁵

Risk-taking behaviors predispose youth to negative outcomes (e.g., unprotected intercourse is a health risk behavior that predisposes an individual to sexually-transmitted infections [STIs] and unwanted pregnancy). The outcomes of these risk-taking behaviors – such as early non-marital childbearing, leaving school early, drug addiction, violence, etc. – compromise a young person’s future and can have high societal costs in the short and long term.

Youth Development

Youth or adolescent development refers to the physical, social, and emotional processes of maturation that occur during the 10 to 24 year age period. The elements of this developmental period include: pubertal maturation,

⁴ Feldman, S., and G. Elliot. 1997. “At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent.” Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2013. “What do we mean by youth?” Available: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>

cognitive development, ability to understand a future time perspective, ability to extrapolate, experimentation (including gender role experimentation), and moral development.

While research and policy on youth have tended to focus on the behavioral aspects of youth development, recent work has shifted to the underlying causes of these behaviors.⁶ Risk factors, also referred to as risk antecedents, are those factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing negative outcomes.⁷ Factors predisposing negative outcomes may be individual (e.g. aggressive temperament), familial (e.g. family breakdown including divorce or separation, violent or substance abusing families, familial mental illness), or environmental (high crime and violent neighborhoods or even climate change).

Counter-balancing such risks are the protective factors⁸ that likewise arise from the individual, familial and social environments in which a young person lives.⁹ For example, individual characteristics that have been repeatedly found to be protective include social skills, intelligence, higher levels of education and a belief in a higher power beyond oneself. Protective family characteristics include a caring parent, an authoritative parenting style,¹⁰ and smaller family size. Likewise, social environments associated with reduced risk include caring non-familial adults, collective self-efficacy, and neighborhood engagement. Thus, as a dynamic process one must concurrently consider both the factors that predispose a young person to vulnerability and those that protect (direct effect) or buffer (indirect or mediated effect) them from harm.

Engaging in pro-social behaviors and avoiding health compromising and future jeopardizing behaviors leads to positive youth development (Roth et al. 1998). A sense of industry and competency, a feeling of connectedness to others and society, a belief in controlling one's fate, and a stable identity are elements of positive development in adolescence.

It is important to note, however, that while risk and protective factors aid in understanding underlying causes of behaviors, the subjective experiences of adolescents and youth are tremendously varied. Although the odds of negative behaviors are much higher for those individuals who have many risk factors, not all succumb. The concept of resilience may help to explain the reasons that youth outcomes are not foreordained. Resilience refers to the self-righting capacity of an individual to bounce back and keep going. It implies resistance to threat but not invincibility¹¹ or invulnerability.¹² Rutter (1993) suggests that resilience is interactive with

⁶ World Bank. 2000. "Trinidad and Tobago. Youth and Social Development. An Integrated Approach for Social Inclusion." Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

⁷ Resnick, M. and M. Hojat. 1998. "Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(10): 823-32.

⁸ Blum, R. 1998. "Healthy Youth Development as a Model for Youth Health Promotion: A Review." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 22, 368-375.

⁹ Patterson and Blum (1996) refer to "resources," Benson (1997) refers to "assets," and Masten (2000) refers to "resilience" as countering the risk factors. See: Patterson, J., and R.W. Blum. 1996. "Risk and resilience among Children and Youth with Disabilities." *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 150:692-98; Benson, P. 1997. "All Kids Are Our Kids." San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; and Masten, A.S., and M.G.J. Reed. 2000. "Resilience in Development." In C.R. Snyder and S.J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., Kosterman, R., Abbott, R. And K.G. Hill. 1999. "Preventing Adolescent Health-risk Behaviors by Strengthening Protection During Childhood." *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 153, 226-234.

¹¹ Garmezy, N. 1991. "Resilience and Vulnerability to Adverse Developmental Outcomes Associated with Poverty." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 34:416-430.

vulnerabilities.¹³ That is, resilience is developmental in nature, stemming from biology and experiences earlier in life, while protective factors may operate in different ways at different stages of development.

For the purpose of this report, the ecological model¹⁴ is adopted to study the various protective and risk factors for youth in the Maldives in the following six areas: health, education, employment, family formation and relationships, violence, and youth civil and socio-political engagement.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

The Maldives consists of 1,192 small tropical islands in the Indian Ocean, of which 190 are inhabited, 105 are self-contained tourist resorts and 21 are used for commercial activities. The Maldives territory crosses strategic shipping routes and the marine environment is richly diverse. With more territorial sea than land, marine resources have played a vital role in shaping the contours of economic development, with nature-based tourism and fishing being key drivers of economic growth.

Demographics

The population of the Maldives is 393,595 (estimate as of July 2014), with the population structure shown below in Figure 1. High annual population growth rates averaging 3% per year in the 1970s through to the 1990s at 3.4% per year,¹⁵ combined with the limited availability of family planning in the outer atolls¹⁶ has resulted in the current population structure. In 2006, 31.1% of the Maldivian population was below 15 years of age, while the working age population (aged between 15 to 64 years) accounted for 62.5% of the population. The median age of the population in 2006 was 22 years, a rise from the median age in 2000, which was 18.7 years.¹⁷

According to the 2012 Statistical Yearbook of the Maldives, 49% of the population is under the age of 25, a minor decline from the previous year, while those in the age category 15-24 now constitute approximately 25% of the country's total population, which is greater than the global average (see Figure 1).¹⁸

The legal age of marriage is 18 for both males and females, and in 2010 the average age for first marriage among youth was 19 years. Some 41% of the marriages in 2010 were in the age

¹² Garmezy, N. 1985. "Stress Resistant Children: The Search for Protective Factors." In J.E. Stevenson (Ed.), Recent Research in Developmental Psychopathology, supplement 4:213-33 of the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

¹³ Rutter, M. 1993. "Resilience: Some Conceptual Considerations." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 14:626-31.

¹⁴ For more information please refer to: Bronfenbrenne, U. 1994. "Ecological Model of Human Development." *International Encyclopedia of Development*, Vol. 2, Second Edition. Oxford: Elsevier. Available: <http://www.psy.cmu.edu/~sieglar/35bronfenbrenner94.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ministry of Health. 2001. "The Maldives Health Report 2001." Available: <http://www.health.gov.mv/publications.asp?id=1>

¹⁶ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 1994. "First Country Programme." Malé: Maldives.

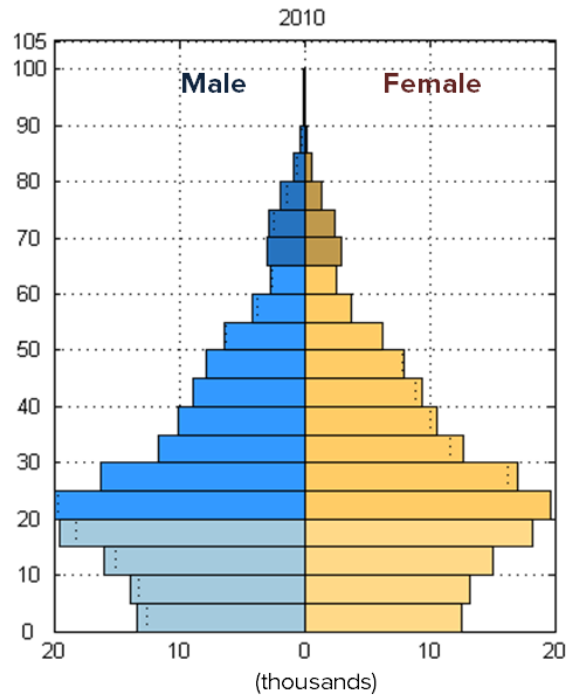
¹⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2012. "ICPD Beyond 2014. Maldives Operational Review 2012. Progress, Challenges and the Way Forward." Malé: UNFPA and the Government of Maldives, Department of National Planning. Available:

<http://www.planning.gov.mv/publications/2013/ICPD%20Beyond%202014%20-%20Maldives%20Operational%20Review%202012-13.05.2013.pdf> (last accessed on January 30, 2014).

¹⁸ Department of National Planning. 2012. "Statistical Yearbook of Maldives - 2012." Malé: Department of National Planning, Government of the Maldives.

group of 20 to 24 years.¹⁹ Although there are reports of Maldivians traveling to Pakistan and India to carry out illegal child marriages, the country has the lowest rate of child marriage in the region, at approximately 4%.²⁰

Figure 1: Total Population by Age Group and Sex, 2010



Source: ICPD Beyond 2014, Country Profile for the Maldives.

Macroeconomic Indicators²¹

Over the last two decades, the Maldives recorded remarkable economic growth, especially when compared with the rest of South Asia. In the early 1980s it was one of the world’s twenty poorest countries. Maldives reached an impressive per capita income of US\$ 2,514 in 2004, from US\$ 771 in 1984, and sustained an annual average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 7.9% in the 15-year period leading up to 2004. This growth was all the more impressive given that the Maldives lacks the resource endowments, scale of economies, and geographical diversity enjoyed by its South Asian neighbors. In addition, these economic achievements have been complemented by high literacy, low maternal and child mortality,

¹⁹ Department of National Planning. 2011. “Maldives Statistical Yearbook 2011.” Malé: Department of National Planning, Government of Maldives. Available: <http://planning.gov.mv/YearBook2011/MDG.pdf>

²⁰ Please see U.S. Department of State. 2010. “U.S. Department of State’s 2010 Human Rights Reports.” Available: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/>; as well as United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2013. “Child Marriage in South Asia: Realities, Responses and the Way Forward.” Paper prepared by Tina Khanna, Ravi Verma and Ellen Weiss. Available: https://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Child_marriage_paper%20in%20South%20Asia.2013.pdf

²¹ Unless otherwise stated, this section is based on World Bank. 2014. “Maldives - Interim strategy note for the period FY14-FY16.” Washington, D.C.; World Bank.

declining poverty levels, and improvements in service delivery during the past decade. Poverty levels have dramatically declined in the Maldives from 23% to 8% during the period of 1997 to 2004. The sustained growth and rising prosperity of the last three decades was founded on a private sector-led tourism industry that is based upon the country's extraordinary natural assets. Tourism directly and indirectly accounts for two-thirds of economic activity in the country.

At the present, however, the Maldives faces some very serious macroeconomic and fiscal challenges. As Box 1 explains, the national budget is continually strained by expenditures in a number of areas,

including public service wages, the Aasandha universal health scheme (which has proven significantly more costly than anticipated), as well as from subsidies, including those for electricity and fuel. Such public expenditures have been the main drivers of spending in Maldives, and have resulted in a major gap between revenues, thus requiring finance through public debt, which is incurred at unsustainable levels, with increasing interest rates. This has led to the description of the Maldives as a *welfare state*.

Public service wages are a significant component of Maldives' high level of public expenditures. In

2012, public sector employment expenditures constituted 37% of the national budget. This reflects the significant presence of public sector employment in the Maldives; approximately 8.3% of the national population (excluding police and military personnel, as well as councilors) is engaged in public employment, and public service constitutes approximately 45-50% of overall formal wage employment across the nation. The large size of Maldives' public sector is at least partially explained by the need to effectively deliver services to a population that is widely dispersed across the island nation. This said, its size and associated financial costs are considered to be unsustainable for the Maldives.

Box 1. Macroeconomic and Fiscal Crisis in the Maldives

External and fiscal imbalances have increased substantially and Maldives is at high risk of debt distress, the source of which is that the country is spending beyond its means. There is an increasing gap between revenues and expenditures, financed by unsustainable levels of public debt. In 2013, total expenditures were above 42 percent of GDP, while total revenue and grants stood at above 32 percent of GDP (the highest in the region). This increase in public spending has been driven by expenditures on the wage bill, universal subsidies (including food and electricity subsidies), social welfare payments, transfers to state-owned enterprises, and capital spending in the outer atolls.

Loose fiscal policy has made macroeconomic management difficult, putting pressure on the balance of payments and external reserves. According to IMF and World Bank estimates, in 2013 usable reserves¹ were critically low at around US\$ 100 million, or three weeks of imports.

Macroeconomic imbalances are putting stress on the banking system, which is confronted to increasing exposure to sovereign risk. High budget deficits have led to dramatic public sector credit expansion. Much of the domestic financing requirement has fallen on the banking sector. This has been crowding out credit to the private sector and putting the banks' balance sheets at risk. These stresses are compounded by the banks' high exposure to the tourism sector.

Source: Interim Strategy Note for the Republic of the Maldives, *World Bank (2014)*

Maldives also faces a major deficiency in qualified human resources. There is a dearth of qualified Maldivians to fill technical, middle and senior management positions, particularly in the tourism sector. This has led to a significant degree of reliance on expatriate workers- of which at least 100,000 have taken up opportunities in Maldives. Such reliance on expatriates demonstrates a clear skills gap in the Maldivian education system.

YOUTH POLICY AND DEFINITIONS

National Youth Policy

An overview of policy and programming on youth across sectors is found in Annex 2. The first youth policy in the Maldives dates back 30 years ago to 1984, when UNESCO assisted the Government of the Maldives to prepare the National Youth Policy (NYP). The policy was based on general guidelines laid down by the President of the Republic in his inaugural address to the National Youth Council on August 23, 1980.²²

In an attempt to address emerging issues faced by youth, in 2003, the Government issued the Youth Policy 2004. However, structural changes affecting youth since then (e.g. increased youth population, increased engagement of young people in various areas, and an increase in drug use and drug involvement in organized crimes, traffic violations and gang activities), have prompted the ministry responsible for youth to commission the drafting of a new bill on youth. As of the report's writing, however, the Maldives did not have this specific legislation related to youth.

The National Youth Council (NYC) acts as an advisory body to the Minister of Human Resources, Youth and Sports (MHRYS). It was established in 1981 as an advisory body composed of sixteen members representing the President's Office, the main technical and social ministries, the educational and training institutes and the private sector. The Minister of MHRYS appoints the members of the NYC, which today is comprised of nine members.

NYC is the national coordinating body for youth affairs, advising the Minister of MHRYS in coordination with other youth departments. Its main functions are:

- To advocate for youth citizenry – including engagement, leadership and voice – through programming, resources, funding and recognition.
- To connect the youth sector and increase youth outreach both locally and overseas.
- To enable the development of youth and the youth sector, through training and capacity building.

²² The focus of the policy is on: strengthening communications between youth and adults; encouraging youth to participate more actively in development projects; promoting sports and other recreational activities; enhancing access to education and linking education to development, community and environmental needs; encouraging youth to connect to national cultural heritage and reinforcing moral education in the wake of growing exposure to external influences and contacts; promoting health, preventive care and hygiene; and increasing opportunities for skills development and income generating activities, as well as leadership training for youth.

In addition to engaging on policy issues, the NYC advises on youth events and conferences, as well as on ways to strengthen and support the programs and activities of youth clubs, associations and NGOs, with a focus on youth friendly services.

Youth Age Definitions in the Maldives

General policy guidelines laid down by the President of Maldives to the National Youth Council in 1980 defined ‘youth’ as being between 15 to 35 years in age; however, this was changed to 18-35 years by the minister responsible for youth, to conform to the amendment of the Children’s Act passed in 2002. The latter act stipulated that children under the age of 18 have legal protections.²³ The ministry responsible for youth and sports has since proposed that the age group be reverted to 15-35 years, the rationale being that by the time a child reaches 18 years of age, she or he has already come across several important events and experiences in life. For example, the following laws designate specific ages that apply to youth transitions:²⁴

- 15 years: Minimum age of criminal responsibility (Rules on Investigation, Adjudication and Sentencing in respect of Offences committed by Minors 02/06)
- 16 years: Minimum legal age for paid employment (Employment Act 2/08)
- 16 years: Eligible to enter into legal contracts (Contract Act 4/91)
- 18 years: Legal protection limit as a child (Children’s Act 9/91)
- 18 years: Minimum age at marriage (Family Law 4/00)
- 18 years: Driving license (Land Transport Act 5/09)
- 18 years: Right to vote; right to run for public office (Constitution)

As it stands today, according to the prevailing policy framework, youth in the Maldives span the 18-35 year old age group. Worldwide, it is not uncommon for youth to cover such a large spectrum of the population. Yet, the current definition applied in the Maldives is not practical, as it spans 17 years and covers many stages in the lives of young people. UNICEF and other relevant organizations argue that youth development should be part of a life-cycle approach to human development, that takes into account different stages of the lifecycle and corollary needs at different development stages, as follows: early childhood (0-5 year olds); elementary (6-10 year olds); middle school (11-14 year olds); high school (15-19 year olds); and young adults (20-24 year olds).²⁵ As noted earlier, this report focuses on the 15-24 year old cohort, consistent with the UN definition.

²³ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2003. “Reproductive and Sexual Health of Adolescents in the Maldives.” Report submitted to UNRC and prepared by Simad Saeed, Ibrahim Naseem, Dheena Moosa, Ahmed Afaal. Available: <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/maldives/drive/RSHAintheMaldives20June2003.pdf>

²⁴ Government of Maldives. 2008. “The Constitution of the Republic of Maldives.” Available: <http://www.maldivesinfo.gov.mv/home/upload/downloads/Compilation.pdf>

²⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2002. “Working For and With Adolescents – Some UNICEF Examples;” Ferber, T. and Pittman, K. (with Marshall, T.). 2002. “State Youth Policy: Helping All Youth to Grow up Fully Prepared and Fully Engaged.” Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment.

3. ISSUES AFFECTING YOUTH

3.1 HEALTH

A comprehensive picture of the health of Maldivian youth is not easy to establish. The health care system in the Maldives is primarily curative, with limited information collected on preventable diseases and other health concerns, such as unintended pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections, violence, mental health disorders, suicide, and the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

In the Maldives, investigating young people's sexual behavior is sensitive and controversial, particularly among unmarried young people. There is widespread stigma as well as cultural taboos surrounding the discussion of sexuality, as well as an extreme reluctance to recognize that young unmarried men and women may be sexually active. Consequently, young people have difficulties accessing contraception, and have limited awareness about sex and human sexuality – particularly in rural settings. Moreover, due to these deeply ingrained social and cultural taboos, as well as a more general lack of youth-specific data that is sex-disaggregated, it difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of the on-the-ground health reality of youth in the Maldives. As a consequence, some of the issues that are of utmost importance to young Maldivians are under-researched and under-discussed.

Box 2. Youth Health Statistics At-a-Glance*

- The average age of first marriage for girls is 19 years, and the average age of becoming pregnant with a first child is 20 years.
- In 2010, 294 births were by mothers under the age of 20.
- HIV prevalence (%) in 2012 among young people aged 15-24, male and female, was <0.1.
- Knowledge and access to information and services on how to prevent unwanted pregnancy is limited.
- Comprehensive knowledge of HIV among females (15-24) for 2008-2012 in urban settings was 43.4 %, and 31.8% in rural settings.
- 1 out of every 3 youth is engaged in drug abuse.
- Maldivian youth remain sexually active before marriage: 3.2% of unmarried women (15-24 years) and 9.8% of men (15-24 years) have had sexual intercourse.

Sources: Statistical Yearbook of Maldives, 2011; The Maldives Health Statistics, 2011; UNICEF Maldives Statistics http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/maldives_maldives_statistics.html; UNFPA Profile of Adolescents and Young People in the Maldives, 2006; CIA Maldives Factsheet, 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mv.html> (last accessed on April 1, 2014); The National Drug Use Survey (2012); Maldives DHS (MOHF & ICF Macro, 2010).

This said, available evidence indicates that Maldivian youth today, consistent with youth elsewhere, face a number of risks related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including risky sexual behavior, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), adolescent pregnancy and unsafe abortions, high use of tobacco, drug and substance abuse, and mental health and suicide. These are discussed in turn.

Sexually Active Unmarried Youth

Under the form of Sharia law practiced in the Maldives, sex before marriage is an offence punishable by flogging, and pregnancy outside marriage is a criminal offence with serious legal and social ramifications. There is evidence however that sexual activity among unmarried Maldivian youth is a reality and that youth initiate sexual activity at an early age, regardless of social norms and legal consequences. For example:

- The 2009 Maldives Demographic and Health Survey, the first nationally representative study to explore premarital sexual activity, found that 3.2% of unmarried women (15-24 years) and 9.8% of unmarried men (15-24 years) had sexual intercourse.
- A Situational Assessment of HIV and AIDS in the Maldives for the Year 2000 notes: *“the rapidly increasing young population, mobility, exposure to foreign lifestyles and long separation from families place higher vulnerability to the risk of HIV”* and that *“a proportion of young people were found to experiment with sex before marriage. Further, parents and relative do not teach anything about sex, and sexuality or related issues to their children.”*²⁶
- The 2004 Reproductive Health Baseline Survey found that youth were generally sexually active before marriage, and two thirds of those who were active had their first experience of sexual intercourse before the age of 18 years.²⁷
- Similarly, the 2008 Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS found that the median age of sexual debut was 20 years old. Surveyed youth had had a median number of five sexual partners during the past year, and while the majority of young people reported having sex with permanent partners, there were reports of young men and young women paying for sex and/or selling sex.²⁸

Unwanted Pregnancies and Unsafe Abortions

*Abortion: “a risk free procedure....and a safe alternative to contraception” - young Maldivian female.*²⁹

Unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions are a concern in Maldives. Findings from the 2010 Statistical Analysis of the Family Protection Unit (FPU) at the Indira Gandhi Memorial

²⁶ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2006. “Policy and Programming for HIV/AIDS & Reproductive Health of Young People in South Asia.” Kathmandu, Nepal: UNFPA CST for South and West Asia.

²⁷ Ministry of Health. 2004. “The Reproductive Health Survey.” Malé: Government of Maldives and the United Nations Population Fund. Pg. 32.

²⁸ In Malé: 9 males and 1 female aged 18-24 years old reported paying for sex, and in Laamu 1 male and 1 female aged 18-24 years old reported selling sex. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2008. “Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS.” Available: <http://www.health.gov.mv/HIV/BBS%20Maldives%202008.pdf> (Last accessed on Jan 26, 2014).

²⁹ Perception of young women interviewed as part of the International Planned Parenthood Federation’s qualitative study on the issue of unsafe abortions in the Maldives conducted in 2008. International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). 2008. “Socio-cultural Factors and Unsafe Abortions in Maldives.” London: IPPF. Pg. 3.

Hospital (IGMH) in Malé show that out of a total of 620 cases attended to by the unit in the analysis period (year 2010), 121 cases were pregnancies outside marriage, and the majority of those cases were among young women ages 18 – 24.³⁰ A gender assessment conducted by the Asian Development Bank in 2007 indicates also that there is an increase in unwanted pregnancies amongst unmarried youth.³¹ The Health Master Plan 1996-2005 contains reports of premarital sexual activity, unsafe sexual practices, and unsafe abortion among adolescents.³²

The domestic legal and social context, as well as cultural norms and attitudes towards pregnancy out of wedlock create a complex and undeniable link between such pregnancies and the practice of unsafe abortion. There are anecdotal stories of Thursday afternoon flights to Colombo, nicknamed as ‘bandu dhonna flight’ or ‘the abortion flight.’³³ Although substantial data is lacking, some evidence suggests that unsafe abortion is common among both married and unmarried populations.³⁴ For example:

- The 2008 Qualitative Study of Sociocultural Factors and Unsafe Abortions in Maldives conducted by the Society for Health Education and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) reports: *“induced abortions were found to be common events among females in Male’ and most of those could be considered to be obtained in unsafe circumstances. The discussions indicated that abortions were more common among unmarried youths than among married couples.”*³⁵
- The 2011 Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women study found that unsafe abortion is a key issue among young Maldivian women who become pregnant outside of marriage.³⁶
- The 2012 ICPD 2014 Survey Workshop conducted as part of the Maldives Country Review revealed concerns about the rise in the number of babies born out of wedlock, babies who had been found murdered or thrown away, as well as the increase in unsafe abortions.³⁷

³⁰ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2011. “Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives.” Malé: UNFPA.

³¹ Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2007. “Maldives: Gender and Development Assessment.”

³² Hameed, S. 2012. “Sexual Health Policies and Youth: A Case Study of the Maldives.” Thesis submitted to the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, June 2012. London School of Economics and Political Science.

³³ Comments to an online article: “Abortion in the Maldives,” Minivan News, January 7, 2010. Available: <http://minivannews.com/society/abortion-in-the-maldives-the-untold-story-2191>

³⁴ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2012. “ICPD Beyond 2014. Maldives Operational Review 2012. Progress, Challenges and the Way Forward.” Malé: UNFPA and the Government of Maldives, Department of National Planning. Available: <http://www.planning.gov.mv/publications/2013/ICPD%20Beyond%202014%20-%20Maldives%20Operational%20Review%202012-13.05.2013.pdf> (last accessed on January 30, 2014).

³⁵ Thalagala, Neil. 2008. “Sociocultural Factors and Unsafe Abortions in Maldives: Qualitative Perspectives.”

³⁶ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2011. “Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives.” Malé: UNFPA.

³⁷ ICPD 2014 Beyond – Maldives. “Workshop for the Maldivian Civil Society.” Available: <http://icpd20maldives.wordpress.com/> (last accessed on February 24, 2014).

Social stigmatization and legal consequences associated with out of wedlock pregnancy, censorship by political, religious or other leaders, and lack of access to safe and legal abortion³⁸ are the main reasons why young women resort to unsafe abortion services.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Unprotected Sex

Unprotected sex and HIV/AIDS are a major risk to young people in the country. The Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS, conducted in 2008 with 605 young people ages 15-24, found that young people surveyed do not use condoms with non-regular partners and do not perceive themselves as being at risk for HIV. According to the survey there is high prevalence of “*unprotected sex with multiple partners*” among the high-risk groups,³⁹ including youth in the 15-24 year age group: 90% of surveyed youth engage in unprotected sex.⁴⁰ The survey also found that a significantly high proportion of 145 youth surveyed in Laamu (23%) and 19% of 460 youth surveyed in Malé reported signs and symptoms of an STI, but the same groups reported poor health-seeking behavior (mostly self-medication or simply taking no action).

Limited Knowledge and Access to Information on Reproductive and Sexual Health

The risky sexual behaviors noted above can be attributed to young people’s limited knowledge about HIV/AIDS, the source and type of information they receive, and facts and information that are available and accessible to them at home, in schools and in their communities.

- The 2008 Biological and Behavioral Survey indicates that 23% of 460 youth interviewed in Malé, and 6% of 145 youth interviewed in Laamu, said “*practicing religion protects one from HIV*”, 20% (and respectively 12%) mentioned “*not changing sex partners often*” as a protective factor.
- The 2009 Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey revealed that 25% of 1,213 never-married female youth respondents and 22% of 1,027 never-married male youth respondents “*had not talked about reproductive health and sexuality with anyone.*”⁴¹ More than half of the respondents did not know that a woman could get pregnant following first sexual intercourse,⁴² a finding that is consistent with the previous 1999 and 2004 SRH Baseline Surveys.⁴³ Furthermore, “Enquiries at the Education Development Centre (EDC) under the Ministry of Education (MoE) which develops

³⁸ Abortion is criminalized in the Maldives, except in pregnancies where the fetus is diagnosed with thalassemia. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Department of Social Affairs (DESA). 2002. “Abortion Policy: Maldives.”

³⁹ High-risk groups in the study included: female sex workers, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, occupational cohorts of men including seafarers, construction workers and resort workers.

⁴⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2008. “Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS.” Available: <http://www.health.gov.mv/HIV/BBS%20Maldives%202008.pdf> (Last accessed on Jan 26, 2014).

⁴¹ Data from the youth questionnaire responses in the Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey, 2009: Ministry of Health and Family and ICF Macro. 2009. “Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey. Preliminary Data.” Malé: Ministry of Health and Family. Available: http://www.health.gov.mv/publications/MDHS%202009%20Preliminary%20Report_LATEST.pdf (last accessed on January 27, 2014).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ For example: Reproductive Health Baseline Survey, 1999 and Reproductive Health Survey, 2004 as described in United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2011. “Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives.” Malé: UNFPA.

the school curriculum, and a brief look through available textbooks showed that RH information is mainly included in the Islam and biology subject syllabi.”⁴⁴

- Findings from focus-group discussions conducted for this report in Malé and three other locations revealed that very limited opportunities exist to gain information on reproductive and sexual health – and such opportunities almost never occur at home with parents or in schools with teachers – leaving young people with no support in terms of knowledge on SRH, HIV/AIDS and STIs.

This above situation leaves young women and men vulnerable to misconceptions and peer pressure, and in the case of women, vulnerable to sexual predators and at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.⁴⁵ The problem is made worse – for women in particular, but also for men – by the fact that most health workers are foreign and male.

Policies and Programs on SRH

To address SRH of youth in the Maldives, the Government took several youth-relevant policy initiatives. These include, among others:

- The Population Policy’s Goal 14 stipulates that population education must be provided to children, adolescents and adults.⁴⁶
- “ICPD+10 and Beyond: Progress, Achievements and Challenges in the Maldives 1994-2004” identifies priority actions that include “[a]ddressing the needs of youth through the provision of information and services, promoting responsible behaviour through strengthening life skills education in schools and out of school youth and carrying out awareness campaigns through media on issues of drug use, unsafe sex, gender based violence etc. and their implications.”⁴⁷
- Health Master Plan 1996-2005 addresses adolescent health within the framework of maternal and child health, and offers strategies to raise awareness on SRH needs in schools.
- National Reproductive Health Strategy 2005-2007⁴⁸ identifies adolescent sexual and reproductive health as a thematic area, with the goal to “improve the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents (10-19) and young people (15-24) in the Maldives.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ The study also considered the issue of the removal of existing SRH information from the primary school syllabus. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2011. “Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives.” Malé: UNFPA. Pg. 23.

⁴⁵ Abdulghafoor, H. 2012. “Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.” Malé: Hope for Women.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Planning and National Development. 2004. “Population Policy of the Maldives.” Malé: Ministry of Planning and Development.

⁴⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2004. “ICPD + 10 and Beyond: Progress, Achievements and Challenges in the Maldives 1994-2004.” Pg. 5. Available: http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/maldives/drive/Brochure_on_IPCD+10_Review_Report_2004.pdf

⁴⁸ Ministry of Health. 2004. “National Reproductive Health Strategy 2005-2007.” Available: <http://www.health.gov.mv/latest%20publications/e-books.asp>

⁴⁹ On Pg. 13, the strategy also identifies the following objectives: (1) 50% of adolescents and youth (10-24 years) have access to age appropriate information related to SRH, (2) ASRH Life Skills Education provided to at least 75% of adolescents/young people in selected schools in Malé, (3) Develop and pilot youth-friendly services on SRH.”

- The 7th National Development Plan 2006-2010 identifies the need to promote awareness of RH among adolescents.⁵⁰

Despite these positive efforts, a nagging problem is that SRH policies continue to focus on promoting awareness⁵¹ rather than dealing with the need for services to deal with STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and unsafe abortions.⁵² Similarly, there are numerous strategies targeting HIV/AIDS but very few addressing information gaps related to other STIs.⁵³

An initiative that holds promise is the Youth Health Café (YHC), which was established in Malé under the Ministry of Human Resources, Youth and Sports. The objective of the YHC is to provide skills training programs, awareness programs on SRH and mental health issues, as well as to foster youth volunteerism, offer career guidance and provide outreach to youth. Inadequate funding and staffing, however, has plagued the YHC, therefore limiting its impact and potential.⁵⁴

Tobacco Use

Smoking is a social and a health problem among Maldivian youth, and its negative consequences and impacts on young people have been well-documented. On a global level, data shows that the Maldives ranks high on overall tobacco use prevalence when compared to international standards, with 57 percent of men and 29 percent of women having used some form of tobacco. Specifically, between the ages of 20-24, 42% of young Maldivians are smokers, one of the highest numbers in the South Asia region, according to the 2009 Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey. Findings from the initial survey revealed 52% of young people smoked a whole cigarette at 16 years and above, with high prevalence among young men specifically. Furthermore, based on customs data, in 2010 alone 346 million cigarettes were imported into the Maldives, at a cost of US\$8 million, a disproportionate figure considering the nation's population of 350,000 citizens, which signals the danger of tobacco use in Maldivian society.

Adolescent tobacco use predicts a range of early and later adult health and social health problems. While such consequences as coronary heart disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease, numerous cancers- including those of the lung, mouth, esophagus, larynx, kidney, pancreas, bladder, stomach and cervix have been well documented, there is also evidence of

⁵⁰ Ministry of Planning and National Development. 2007. "7th National Development Plan 2006-2010." Malé: Ministry of Planning and National Development.

⁵¹ Ministry of Health. 2004. "National Reproductive Health Strategy 2005-2007." Available: <http://www.health.gov.mv/latest%20publications/e-books.asp>; Ministry of Planning and National Development. 2004. "Population Policy of the Maldives." Malé: Ministry of Planning and Development; Ministry of Planning and National Development. 2007. "7th National Development Plan 2006-2010." Malé: Ministry of Planning and National Development.

⁵² Narcotics Control Board (NCB). 2003. "Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug Abuse in Maldives 2003;" Thalagala, N. 2008. "Sociocultural Factors and Unsafe Abortions in Maldives: Qualitative Perspectives."

⁵³ Commerce Development and Environment Pvt Ltd. (CDE). 2003. "Reproductive and Sexual Health of Adolescents in the Maldives." Available: http://www.unfpa.org.mv/downloads/RSHA_2003.pdf; Ministry of Health and Family. 2009. "Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey." Malé: Ministry of Health and Family.

⁵⁴ Hameed, S. 2012. "Sexual Health Policies and Youth: A Case Study of the Maldives." Thesis submitted to the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, June 2012. London School of Economics and Political Science.

the possible harmful effects of youth tobacco smoking on later social, emotional, and behavioral well-being, later tobacco use and the initiation of alcohol use or the development of alcohol-related problems.⁵⁵

Drug Abuse

Drug use is a growing challenge in the Maldives. The majority of drug users in the Maldives are between 15-25 years of age.⁵⁶ According to UNFPA's Youth Voices Report in 2005, 68% of 4,002 youth ages 15-24 surveyed in a joint UN study identified drugs as a challenge facing Maldivian youth today.⁵⁷ A staggering number of young people first experience or witness drug use and injection at an early age. For example, the 2003 Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug Abuse revealed that almost half of all users (47%) were below the age of 20 years and that the mean age of drug use initiation was 16.8 years.⁵⁸ The 2008 Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS found that the median age of first drug use ranges from 16 to 17, with the age of first drug use being nine years.⁵⁹

The field-based survey conducted for this report revealed that among current drug users, as many as 73% in Malé and 49% in the atolls were less than 24 years old. Their median age was 21 in Malé, and 25 years in the atolls. Young persons in the age group of 15-19 years accounted for the highest proportion of drug users in Malé, comprising 47% of all youth interviewed.

Illicit drug use is mostly a male phenomenon.⁶⁰ The 2003 Rapid Situation Assessment found that 97% of drug users were males.⁶¹ This is consistent with prior research findings and re-confirmed by findings from the field-based research conducted for this report, which revealed that a large majority of current drug users are young males, especially those younger men and urban youth in Malé.

Common reasons for drug initiation include perceived false positive outcomes from drug use. The 2011/2012 National Drug Use survey notes that, "*more common reasons for initiation of drug use could be seen as 'pull' factors because of perceived positive outcomes of drug use as opposed to the 'push' factors where drugs are used to deal with certain perceived negative factors in life.*"

⁵⁵ Mathers, M., Toumbourou, J.W., Catalano, R.F., Williams, J., and G.C. Patton. 2006. "Consequences of Youth Tobacco Use: a Review of Prospective Behavioural Studies." *Addiction*. 2006 July; 101(7):948-58.

⁵⁶ Ahmed, S.K. 1998. "Report of the Preparatory Mission for Rapid Assessment Study in Maldives." New Delhi: UNDCP, ROSA; Naaz, A.A. 2002. "Country Report on Maldives." Presented at the First Regional Meeting of Technical Committee on Social Development, Kathmandu, Nepal; Shakoor, A. 2001. "Country Report on Maldives." Presented at the Twenty Fifth meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and Pacific, 15-18 October 2001.

⁵⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2005. "Maldives: Youth Voices Report 2005." Malé: UNFPA.

⁵⁸ Foundation for Advancement of Self Help in Attaining Needs (FASHAN) and NCB. 2003. "Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug Abuse in Maldives 2003." Malé: UNESCAP and UNDP.

⁵⁹ For Malé, the median age was 16, and for Addu, 17 years. First drug use was reported at 9 years in both locations. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2008. "Biological and Behavioral Survey on HIV and AIDS." Available: <http://www.health.gov.mv/HIV/BBS%20Maldives%202008.pdf> (Last accessed on Jan 26, 2014).

⁶⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2013. "National Drug Use Survey, Maldives - 2011/2012." Malé: UNODC.

⁶¹ Foundation for Advancement of Self Help in Attaining Needs (FASHAN) and NCB. 2003. "Rapid Situation Assessment of Drug Abuse in Maldives 2003." Malé: UNESCAP and UNDP.

Drug use is also associated with high rates of crime in the Maldives. According to Maldives Police Services, 2012 Crime Statistics, drug related offences are the third most common crime reported to the police in the Maldives.⁶² Police records indicate that between 2001 and 2007, drug offences increased by over 500% and violent crimes by 200% in Malé.

Furthermore, a 2011 UNDP-Government study, *Prison Assessment and Proposed Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders*, revealed that the majority of prisoners were serving a sentence for drug related offences, of which, about 70% were for drug use.⁶³ Other sources provide similar findings, including the 2004 UNDP report on gender issues in the Criminal Justice System in the Maldives, which notes that, “many, if not most, young women involved in the criminal justice system had either been sentenced for drug offences or had committed other offences related to their drug use,”⁶⁴ while the 2011 Statistical Yearbook of Maldives reports that a total of 783 persons in 2006, and 1,187 persons in 2007 had been detained by the Maldives Police Service in relation to drug use offences, out of which the majority of individuals were between the ages of 16-24 years.⁶⁵

According to a report published by the Asia Foundation in 2011, there are inadequate rehabilitation services and unqualified specialized health workers for people convicted of drug-related offences, which leads to complications when they are released from jail.⁶⁶ Stigmatized by their drug-related prison sentence, they struggle to reintegrate into the community, find and maintain jobs, and resume using drugs. As a consequence, they either join or rejoin gangs: “people do not give offenders.... [...addicts...]a second chance... once they get labeled it is hard to get back into the community... they cannot start a life as no one would give them a job, no parent will allow their daughter to go out with them.”⁶⁷

In response to the increasing challenges faced by Maldivian youth, including drugs, substance abuse and related gang activities, a Juvenile Justice Unit (JJU) was established in 2005 to address both the increase in juvenile delinquencies and the need for the establishment of a system that facilitates the rehabilitation and reform of young offenders. Further, in light of the early age of initiation and first injection among youth, the Government of Maldives launched the new Drug Act 17/2011- a major milestone for addressing drug abuse in the country – as it places emphasis on rehabilitation and treating drug users rather than promoting incarceration. Under this Act, the National Drug Agency has been mandated as the lead agency dealing with all issues related to drug prevention, harm reduction and treatment.⁶⁸

⁶² Maldives Police Service. “Crime Statistics 2012.” Available: <http://www.police.gov.mv/#eservice> (last accessed on February 13, 2014).

⁶³ Among this group, the majority had used heroin (69.1%) and cannabis (63.3%), followed by alcohol (47.9%). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2011. “Prison Assessment and Proposed Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders Report.” Government of Maldives and UNDP.

⁶⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2004. “Gender Issues in the Criminal Justice System of the Maldives.” University of Melbourne, 2 September 2004.

⁶⁵ Department of National Planning. 2011. “Maldives Statistical Yearbook 2011.” Malé: Department of National Planning, Government of Maldives. Available: <http://planning.gov.mv/YearBook2011/MDG.pdf>

⁶⁶ The Asia Foundation and Maldives Institute for Psychological Services, Training and Research. 2012. “Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé.” Colombo: The Asia Foundation. Available: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/GangViolenceReportFINAL.pdf> (last accessed on January 31, 2014).

⁶⁷ Statement from a gang member interviewed in Malé. Ibid.

⁶⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2013. “National Drug Use Survey. Maldives - 2011/2012.” Malé: UNODC.

Mental Health and Suicide

The mental health and wellbeing of youth is presently a strong concern in the Maldives. The ill effects of drugs and illicit substance abuse among youth, poor reproductive and sexual health behaviors, and other social challenges - such as witnessing and experiencing violence, and unemployment or underemployment - pose growing risks for the psychological well-being of youth. Additionally, the 2004 tsunami left over-whelming traces of physical damage and psychological distress among young men and young women in the nation.

- Several studies, including the 2006 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Aspects of Disaster Preparedness in the Maldives study, the 2005 Ministry of Planning's study of the tsunami disaster, the World Bank's 2005 study of the impact of the tsunami, the World Food Programme's 2005 Rapid Assessment Report of the Impact of the Tsunami in the Maldives, and the 2005 World Health Organization study on mental health and psychosocial relief efforts after the tsunami in South-East Asia, all report that the 2004 tsunami in the Maldives had a direct effect on the psychological health of youth.⁶⁹
- A 2007 research study addressing the initial response by national and international agencies to gender issues during the aftermath of the Maldives' tsunami suggests that, *"men seemed to suffer more mental anguish because they felt they were unable to fulfill their proper 'male' role of providing for their family."*⁷⁰
- Findings from the survey conducted for this report show that more than 1 in 4 young people (28%) reported feeling sad, at loss or depressed for two weeks or more in a row. Suffering from social anxiety was also confirmed by 2% of all young women and young men interviewed in the study.

Focus-group discussions conducted for this report with young men in Mahibadhoo Island revealed that the most common reasons for feeling sad or being depressed are frustration with reality and a lack of opportunities for 'active involvement' (e.g. through intellectual or physical activities outside of school, access to or participation in entertainment such as movie theaters, concerts, youth social groups), poverty and unemployment, and the difficulty in discussing personal problems and concerns with adults and within their families. Younger men indicated that conservative cultural traditions and social norms, as well as difficulties in fulfilling these expectations, combined with their *"different than their parents"* reality, is one of the strongest predictors of depression and sadness.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "Ministry of Health Republic of Maldives. 2005. "Emergency Preparedness and Response Health Sector Plan (Draft)"; World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the United Nations System. 2005. "The Impact of the Tsunami: Joint Needs Assessment"; World Food Programme (WFP). 2005. "Rapid Assessment Report of the Impact of the Tsunami in the Maldives." Rome: WFP; World Health Organization (WHO). 2005. "Mental health and psychosocial relief efforts after the tsunami in South-East Asia"; Ministry of Planning and National Development. 2006. "Preliminary Results From the Population and Housing Census 2006." Malé: Ministry of Planning; The President's Office and Television Maldives. 2005. "The Tsunami disaster in the Maldives." Male: Government of Maldives. DVD.

⁷⁰ Fulu, E. 2007. "Gender, Vulnerability, and the Experts: Responding to the Maldives Tsunami." *Development and Change*, 38(5): 843–864 (2007).

⁷¹ Focus-group discussions in Malé and in Mahibadhoo were conducted by Piotr Pawlak, independent consultant for the World Bank, while focus-group discussions in Maalhos and in Dharavandoo were conducted by Natasha Leite, independent consultant for UNICEF. For

Suicides are an issue in the Maldives. From 0.7 per 100,000 citizens in 2005, the number of all suicides increased to 10 per 100,000 in 2008. The number of suicides in a year doubled from 14 in 2007 to more than 30 in 2008,⁷² and young people are not excluded from this group. Although solid data is lacking, findings from the survey conducted for this report revealed that 15% of respondents knew someone who attempted suicide, and 9% reported an attempted suicide within the last twelve months.

Stigma and social discrimination associated with seeking and accessing mental health services and the overall unavailability of youth-focused services inhibit young men and women from receiving support and information on mental and other health services. Research confirms that youth may be afraid of, or are deterred by services that are not youth-focused; intimidating environments, including inflexible opening hours; costs of services; resistant or unresponsive health care providers; discomfort in requesting assistance or resources; or they may also be unaware of what services are offered.⁷³ Furthermore, with transportation between islands being difficult and expensive, remote islands are deprived of professional mental health services which address the mental well-being needs of youth.⁷⁴ Currently, the only out-patient facility for mental health is at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé, and only two psychiatrists working in the Maldives focus on the area of drug rehabilitation.⁷⁵

more information, please see: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2014. "Youth in the Maldives: Challenges and Recommendations." Draft. Malé: UNICEF (unpublished).

⁷² Government of Maldives. 2009. "Presidential Address 2009." Malé: President's Office, Government of the Maldives.

⁷³ Chandra-Mouli, V., Bloem, P. and J. Ferguson. 2013. "The World Health Organization's Work on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health." *Bundesgesundheitsblatt Gesundheitsforschung Gesundheitsschutz* 56 (2), February 2013, Pg. 256-61; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2012. "Strategy on Adolescents and Youth"; World Health Organization (WHO). 2012. "Making Health Services Adolescent Friendly: Developing National Quality Standards for Adolescent Friendly Health Services. WHO: Geneva. Available:

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/75217/1/9789241503594_eng.pdf

⁷⁴ Ibrahim, A. and A. Hameed. 2006. "Mental health and psychosocial support aspects of disaster preparedness in the Maldives." *International Review of Psychiatry*, December 2006; 18(6): 573–578.

⁷⁵ Government of the Maldives. 2010. "Activities Addressing Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Human Rights Commission of the Maldives." Malé: Government of the Maldives. Available: <http://www.hrcm.org.mv/publications/otherreports/DisabilityReport13April2010.pdf>

3.2 EDUCATION⁷⁶

The Maldives has shown impressive progress towards achieving education targets set by the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to universal primary education and gender equality in education. Progress has also been made in increasing the number of schools: until 1992, ten years of schooling was available only in Malé. However, in 1992 the Southern Secondary School was established in Addu City, as the first secondary school to open outside Malé. The second secondary school located in an atoll, Jalaluddin School in Haa Dhaalu Kulhudhuffushi, went into operation in 1998. Lower secondary education is now available in 187 schools, and 33 schools across the country offer grades 11-12. As a result, the net enrolment rate of students attending secondary schools has increased from 42.5% in 2001 to 92.3% in 2013.

Despite positive developments, young people face challenges in accessing quality education that will facilitate their transition into adulthood. Higher education participation is low for a middle-income country and the gross higher education enrollment rate is only 6%. Challenges also differ by gender, with males faring worse than females at the primary and secondary levels, in terms of enrollment, rates of repetition, and scores on standardized tests, and girls are still discouraged from attending school.

Quality of Education and Low Educational Achievement

Quality of education is a significant challenge facing the Maldives, as illustrated by the following findings:⁷⁷

Box 3. Education Statistics

At-a-Glance

- Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate for 2008-2012, male: 99.2%, female: 99.4%¹
- Pre-primary school participation, gross enrollment rate for 2008 - 2012,* male: 113%, female: 117.5%
- Primary school participation, net enrollment rate for 2013,** male: 93.8%, and female: 95.0%
- Primary school participation, gross enrollment rate for 2013,** male: 99.3%, female: 98.7%
- Lower secondary school participation, net enrollment rate for 2013,** male: 91.4% and female 99.3%
- Lower secondary school participation, gross enrollment rate for 2013,** male: 93.8% and female 95.4%

* Data refers to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading, in UNICEF Maldives Statistics.

** Data refers to latest school statistics, Ministry of Education.

Sources: UNICEF Maldives Statistics. Available: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/maldives_maldives_statistics.html and http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Maldives_COAR_2012.pdf; Ministry of Education School Statistics 2013. Available: http://www.moe.gov.mv/assets/upload/STAT_BOOK_2013.pdf

⁷⁶ Unless otherwise stated, this section is based on Aturupane, H. and M. Shojjo. 2012. "Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives. Challenges and Prospects." South Asia: Human Development Unit. Report No. 51. Discussion Paper Series. World Bank. Available: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2012/04/05/000406484_20120405155733/Rendered/PDF/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf (last accessed on February 2, 2014).

- Although access to seven years of primary education is available in all inhabited islands of Maldives, net enrollment in primary education is declining.⁷⁸
- In the most recent report, as part of the 2012 Maldives Operational Review, UNFPA indicates a sharp drop in net enrollment at the higher secondary education level to 19%, and shows that the net enrollment rate at the higher secondary level is higher for males, with an NER of 18.4%, in comparison to 16.4% for females.⁷⁹ The report suggests that one of the main reasons for such a sharp drop in participation at the higher secondary level has been the limited number of schools offering grades 11-12: out of about 220 schools in the Maldives, until recently only 5 provided higher secondary education.⁸⁰
- The average scores for English at grades 4 and 7 are merely 32% and 29% respectively, and the average scores for mathematics are only 39% and 30% at the same grade levels. There are also substantial regional disparities. Learning outcomes are considerably higher in Malé than in the atolls, especially in the English language, which is a prerequisite for employment in a tourism-based economy.
- Examination pass rates at the General Certificate of Examination Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) show low results: of 6,346 young people who sat for the GCE Ordinary Level Examination in 2012, only 41% passed in five or more subjects. This suggests that the majority of the young people who complete ten years of schooling are unable to secure further education.⁸¹

Focus-group discussions conducted for this report in Mahibadhoo Island revealed that there is a sense of disconnect between the quality of the current educational curriculum and the level of preparedness and applicability it offers for youth in future employment.⁸² The interviews noted, “*a significant worry about the standard of educational services and curriculum,*” while “*there is a disparity between those in islands and in Malé.*”⁸³

Lower educational attainment has been found to decrease work opportunities and future earnings.⁸⁴ Low levels of educational outcomes and regional differences across the Maldives are a serious concern, as the cognitive skills of a labor force are closely related to the

⁷⁷ World Bank. 2013. “Project Information Document. Education Sector Development Project. South Asia, Maldives.” Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Education. 2013. “Education Statistics 2012.” Malé: Ministry of Education.

⁷⁹ Department of National Planning. 2011. “National Planning, Household and Income and Expenditure Survey, 2009-2010.” Malé: Department of National Planning, Government of Maldives.

⁸⁰ Osorio, C. G. and D.E. Fonseka. 2013. “Maldives Development Update.” Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Available: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/10/18612521/maldives-development-update> (last accessed January 22, 2014).

⁸¹ Aturupane, H. and M. Shojo. 2012. “Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives. Challenges and Prospects.” South Asia: Human Development Unit. Report No. 51. Discussion Paper Series. World Bank. Available: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/04/05/000406484_20120405155733/Rendered/PDF/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf (last accessed on February 2, 2014).

⁸² Information obtained in focus group discussions held with youth in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll. Discussions held on January 11, 2014.

⁸³ Interview with Council President of the Alif Dhaal Atoll, and Council Director of the Alif Dhaal Atoll. Interview held on January 11, 2014 in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll.

⁸⁴ Pereznieta, P., Harper, C., Clench, B. and J. Coarasa. 2010. “The Economic Impact of School Violence.” Woking and London: Plan International and Overseas Development Institute.

economic development of a country.⁸⁵ Thus, the weak and low educational outcomes among youth, especially in the lagging atolls, will hamper the future economic competitiveness and prospects of the country.⁸⁶

Aware of the modest learning outcomes at both the primary and secondary levels, in addition to substantial regional disparities, the Ministry of Education has increased the number of schools offering higher secondary education in atolls, where there are sufficient student numbers to make this expansion viable, to 38 schools (four schools in Malé and 34 schools in the atolls). The Ministry of Education is also promoting private-public partnerships to increase tertiary education opportunities.⁸⁷

Despite these developments, underperformance and school dropout among young males persists, while females continue to face barriers to education in the Maldives, including discrimination and discouragement when it comes to making choices among different fields of study at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Underperformance of Male Youth

Educational trends in the Maldives have begun to resemble those of the Global North: where gender parity has finally been achieved in education, the trend is now that boys are faring worse at the primary and secondary levels, in terms of enrollment, rates of repetition, and scores on standardized tests.⁸⁸

- A 2012 World Bank report addressing challenges and prospects of the education sector in the Maldives suggests that young men show modest outcomes in primary and lower secondary education – and these disparities in learning outcomes are even wider between the Malé Atoll and elsewhere in the Maldives.⁸⁹
- Records from the examination pass rates at the General Certificate of Examination Ordinary Level (GCEO/L) also show poor results for boys: in 2010 only 33% of boys passed (in comparison to 37% of girls).⁹⁰ Similarly, examination pass rates at the

⁸⁵ Hanushek, E. and L. Woessmann. 2008. "The Role of Cognitive Skills in Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 46 (3): 607-668.; and Hanushek, E. and F. Welch (Eds.). 2006. "Handbook of the Economics of Education - Volume 1." Amsterdam: Elsevier Science and Technology Books.

⁸⁶ Aturupane, H. and M. Shojó. 2012. "Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives. Challenges and Prospects." South Asia: Human Development Unit. Report No. 51. Discussion Paper Series. World Bank. Available: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/04/05/000406484_20120405155733/Rendered/PDF/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf (last accessed on February 2, 2014).

⁸⁷ World Bank. 2013. "Project Information Document. Education Sector Development Project. South Asia, Maldives." Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

⁸⁸ Barker, G., Verma, R., Crownover, J., Segundo, M., Fonseca, V., Conteras, J.M., Heilman, B. and P. Pawlak. 2012. "Boys and Education in the Global South: Emerging Vulnerabilities and New Opportunities for Promoting Changes in Gender Norms." *THYMOS Journal of Boyhood*, Vol. 6, Issue 2, Year 2012. Harriman, TN: The Men's Studies Press.

⁸⁹ Aturupane, H. and M. Shojó. 2012. "Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives. Challenges and Prospects." South Asia: Human Development Unit. Report No. 51. Discussion Paper Series. World Bank. Available: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/04/05/000406484_20120405155733/Rendered/PDF/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf (last accessed on February 2, 2014).

⁹⁰ The time trend, however, has been positive. The GCE O/L pass rate among boys has risen from 26% in 2007 to 33% in 2010, and among girls from 25% in 2007 to 37% in 2010. However, this increase in the GCE O/L pass rate over time may be over-estimated, as in recent years there appear to be some schools which have kept back their weaker students from sitting for the GCE O/L in order to raise

General Certificate of Examination Advanced Level (GCE A/L) in 2010 were only 35% for boys, and 43% for girls. This is an inadequate pass rate, as it suggests that two out of every three boys are unsuccessful in passing the examination.

Various studies suggest that the different ways boys are socialized contribute to their underperformance in school. Issues include: a lack of male role models in homes for boys to emulate for school achievement; the fact that being recognized as a man in some settings means defining oneself as anti-academic or anti-school; and the preponderance of female teachers (which may imply that classroom styles are more geared towards styles of learning and interaction for women and girls).⁹¹ In fact, the 2013 Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum shows clearly that in the Maldives, 73% of teachers in primary education and 67% in tertiary education are females.⁹²

School dropout is an emerging important issue with net enrolment in both primary and secondary school showing a declining trend.⁹³ Consequences of dropping out or being delayed in school have both short and long term effects on girls and boys. For instance, missing school affects the development of skills such as reading and writing, which in turn affect the progress and rate of cognitive development.⁹⁴

Education Issues Pertaining to Females

A lack of support and encouragement to continue education beyond the primary level continues to affect the lives of young Maldivians, and young women more specifically. Research-based evidence suggests:

- As documented in the 2009 UNICEF State of the World Childrens report, increasing religious fundamentalism and an emerging prevalence of conservative ideas for women's roles in the society are negatively affecting girls' school attendance.⁹⁵
- Recent anecdotal evidence from young women who took part in the rapid situation assessment of maternal health, SRHR, gender equality and women's empowerment issues in the Maldives, as part of the Shadow Report to the Committee on the

their overall pass rates. Such a practice would artificially increase the GCE O/L pass rate. For more information, please see: Aturupane, H. and M. Shoji. 2012. "Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives. Challenges and Prospects." South Asia: Human Development Unit. Report No. 51. Discussion Paper Series. World Bank. Available: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/04/05/000406484_20120405155733/Rendered/PDF/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf (last accessed on February 2, 2014).

⁹¹ Barker, G. 2005. "Dying to Be Men: Youth, Masculinity and Social Exclusion." London: Routledge; and Chevannes, B. 2006. "The role of men in families in the Caribbean: A historical perspective." In Bannon, I. and Correia, M.C. (eds.) *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Pg. 73-92.

⁹² Available: <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR13/Maldives.pdf> (last accessed on February 8, 2014).

⁹³ For more information, please see the Ministry of Education website: <http://www.moe.gov.mv/>

⁹⁴ De Castro, E., Zenaida, A., Camacho, V., Faye, A., Balanon, G. and M.T. Galang. 2012. "Children Caught in Conflicts: Assessing the Psychosocial Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in the Philippines." *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 9(3): 249–265 (2012).

⁹⁵ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2009. "State of the Worlds Children 2009."

Elimination of Discrimination against Women, suggests that, *“the expectation for young school leavers, especially in the islands, is to become a good housewife.”*⁹⁶

- The 2009 UNICEF report addressing barriers to girls’ education in South Asia found that the systems of secondary and post-secondary education and vocational training programs in the Maldives have excluded equitable girls’ participation.⁹⁷ The same report suggests that because opportunities for post-primary education are available only in urban areas or city centers situated only on some islands, it becomes nearly impossible for girls to continue their education as their safety away from home becomes an issue.⁹⁸
- A report by the International Trade Union Confederation in 2009 found that although equal access to education is provided for boys and girls, parents end formal education for girls upon completion of primary school and keep them from leaving their home island for secondary school.⁹⁹
- A 2011 Rapid Situation Assessment of the Maldives conducted by the Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW) observed that, *“the low levels of access to higher secondary enrolment, challenges to mobility and employment opportunities especially for girls mean that marriage is the somewhat inevitable life option available for young women.”*¹⁰⁰

Limited Progress on Higher Education

Progress on higher education has been limited. A recently completed World Bank report indicates that the demand for higher education is increasing as the proportion of youth among the population who complete secondary education rises.¹⁰¹ With the per capita income of the country increasing, the demand for higher education is expanding as the educational aspirations of young people grow in relation to increasing affluence.

On addressing the issue of higher education in the Maldives, the report estimates that the higher education system (degree or above and pre-degree level) has a total enrollment of about 11,000 - 12,000 students. Over 95% of enrollment is in pre-degree level diploma and certificate programs. However, these higher education enrolment rates are low for a middle-

⁹⁶ Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW). 2011. “Maternal Health, Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Rapid Situation Assessment of the Maldives.” Malaysia: ARROW (unpublished).

⁹⁷ The country has achieved reduced fertility and child mortality, as well as women’s increased access to micro-credit, but this study finds no research-based evidence to demonstrate that universal participation of Maldivian girls in basic education has contributed to such achievements. The literature does not reveal any case, story or narrative of girls and women that explains how a basic-educated girl or woman has made sense out of her educational participation. Gender parity of enrollment in primary education has not revealed much about parity or disparities in other areas of education, or about other socio-economic and political benefits to girls and women. For more information please see United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2009. “Overcoming Barriers to Girls’ Education in South Asia. Deepening the Analysis.” Kathmandu: UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA). Available: http://www.unicef.org/rosa/whole_book_b.pdf.

⁹⁸ See comments above.

⁹⁹ International Trade Union Confederation. 2009. “Internationally Recognized Core Labor Standards in the Maldives.” Report For the World Trade Organization General Council Review of the Trade Policies of Maldives. Executive Summary. Geneva, 26 and 28 October, 2009. Available: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Trade_Policy_Review_Maldives_final_october_09_.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW). 2011. “Maternal Health, Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Rapid Situation Assessment of the Maldives.” Malaysia: ARROW (unpublished).

¹⁰¹ World Bank. 2011. “Higher Education in the Maldives: An Evolving Seascape.” South Asia Human Development Sector. Report No. 36. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

income country. If only university degree level or equivalent enrollment is considered, the gross higher education enrollment rate (GER) is about 6%. This is approximately the same GER as countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, which are much poorer than the Maldives, and have less developed basic education systems. This figure is also about half the GER in India, and less than a third of the GER in Sri Lanka. The main reasons for the low enrollment in higher education are very limited access to higher education opportunities, and generally poor access to and completion of higher secondary education in the country.¹⁰²

Quality and Skills of Teachers

“Teachers are essential players in promoting quality education; they are advocates for, and catalysts of, change. No education reform is likely to succeed without the active participation and ownership of teachers.”¹⁰³

According to Department of National Planning statistics for 2010, 1 in 4 local teachers in the country are untrained. The proportion of untrained teachers in atolls is higher than in Malé (10% in Malé, in comparison to 27% in the atolls).¹⁰⁴

The Maldives Operational Review 2012 reports that teachers lack necessary training for the early detection of learning difficulties among students, as well as to work with children with disabilities.¹⁰⁵ Focus-groups discussions held in Haa Dhaal Atoll as part of the Maldives Country Review for the ICPD 2014 Survey found that apart from the capital island Kulhudhufushi, all the other islands reported that children with disabilities did not attend any form of mainstream schooling because of a lack of trained teachers.¹⁰⁶ The high percentage of untrained teachers at the primary level has a cumulative effect on the learning deficiencies of students in secondary education and beyond. Large discrepancies in trained teachers between atolls and Malé also create an imbalance in the quality of education offered throughout the country.

In recent years, the Government of Maldives has initiated several policy initiatives to improve the quality of education. These include the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Maldives Education Master Plan 1996–2005, the Ministry of Planning and National Development: Sixth National Development Plan 2001–2005, and the Ministry of Education

¹⁰² “The higher education sector in the Maldives is comprised of the Maldives National University (converted from the Maldives College of Higher Education in February 2011), with student enrollment of approximately 6,256 students, the Maldives Polytechnic with around 630 students, and seven private sector higher education institutions that provide higher education courses and programs including: Clique College (757), Cyryx College (2557), Focus Education Center (552), International Business Systems Overseas (752), Mandhu College (472), Modern Academy for Professional Studies (237), and Villa College (608)” – as quoted in World Bank. 2011. “Higher Education in the Maldives: An Evolving Seascape.” South Asia Human Development Sector. Report No. 36. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

¹⁰³ Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO). 2005. “Learning from Listening - A policy report on Maldivian teachers’ attitudes to their own profession.” London: VSO.

¹⁰⁴ Osorio, C. G. and D.E. Fonseka. 2013. “Maldives Development Update.” Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Available: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/10/18612521/maldives-development-update> (last accessed January 22, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2012. “ICPD Beyond 2014. Maldives Operational Review 2012. Progress, Challenges and the Way Forward.” Malé: UNFPA and the Government of Maldives, Department of National Planning. Pg. 34. Available:

¹⁰⁶ The focus-group discussions were held in Hdh. Kulhudhufushi, Hdh. Neykurendhoo, Hdh. Kurinbee, Hdh. Nohivaram and Hdh. Nohivaramfaru, Haa Dhaal Atoll, from 21 – 22 September 2012. Available at the official web page of ICPD+20 Maldives: <http://icpd20maldives.wordpress.com/> (last accessed on February 8, 2014).

Strategic Action Plan 2004–2006. However, a lack of trained teachers to meet some of the professional development needs in schools continues to persist.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO). 2005. "Learning from Listening - A policy report on Maldivian teachers' attitudes to their own profession." London: VSO.

3.3 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the world is facing a worsening youth unemployment crisis, with young people three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.¹⁰⁸ The unemployment problem – estimated to amount to some 73 million young people in search of work – is not limited to developing countries. Alarm bells are sounding in Europe and in the United States.¹⁰⁹ In the Maldives, unemployment is also a concern, although there is debate on whether the problem is one related to the supply of jobs, since the Maldives attracts a large proportion of foreign workers, or rather the demand for jobs, since many argue that the welfare state of the Maldives creates little incentive to take up just any employment opportunity. Added to this reality are the perceptions and expectations of parents as to what are acceptable employment opportunities and wages for their children, thus leading to a national phenomenon referred to as “youth voluntary unemployment.” Drawing on field research and other sources, this section explores youth and labor market issues.

Youth Employment and Unemployment in Numbers

As in other countries worldwide, unemployment in the Maldives is more of a youth phenomenon. But among youth, it is also a more specifically gender-based phenomenon. As shown in table 1 below, the female unemployment rate (ages 15-24) is 3 times higher than the unemployment rate among males for the same age category. While the unemployment rate decreases significantly among males between the ages of 20-24 (from 24.7% among 15-19 year olds, to 10.3% among 20-24 year olds), the rate remains high among females for the same age category (the unemployment rate is 35.3% for females between the age of 15-29, and decreases to 27.9% among 20-24 year olds).

Youth unemployment rates are much higher for females than for males, although their proportion of the total unemployed labor force tends to be lower. For the 20-24 year old age group, the rate is almost three times higher for females than males, and 50% higher for the 15-19 age group. This does not take into account the fact that many youth may be “discouraged workers,” meaning that they may not spend time searching for a job opportunity as it is assumed that they are unlikely to find one.

In terms of regional comparisons, the Maldives has high youth unemployment levels: it is highest in Maldives (22%) and Sri Lanka (21.3%), and double the rates of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.¹¹⁰ Compared to youth unemployment in other countries, the Maldives ranks as the 42nd highest in the world (among 129 countries).

A significant number of young men and women are neither participating in education nor working. As Table 2 indicates, in the age 15-19 year age group, 20.5% of young men and 26.5% of young women are neither in school nor working. The number reaches almost 30%

¹⁰⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO). (n.d.) “Youth employment.” Available: <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang--de/index.htm>

¹⁰⁹ Connolly, K. 2013. “Angela Merkel: Youth unemployment is most pressing issue facing Europe.” The Guardian. 2 July 2013. Available: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/02/angela-merkel-youth-unemployment-europe>

¹¹⁰ The rates were 10.5, 9.3 and 7.7 percent for India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, respectively.

for 20-24 year old females. Youth unemployment contributes to other social ills such as drug abuse and gang-related violence.

Table 1. Employment and Unemployment in the Maldives, by sex and age, 2009

Locality, sex & age	Total 15 years of age & over	Economically active			Not economically active	Not stated	Labor force participation rate	Unemployment rate
		Total	Employed	Unemployed				
Both Sexes	205,931	128,836	110,231	18,605	63,642	13,453	62.6	14.4
15-19	39,904	14,055	9,913	4,142	23,730	2,119	35.2	29.5
20-24	34,809	25,420	20,802	4,618	7,932	1,457	73.0	18.2
Male	103,634	75,682	69,701	5,981	20,648	7,304	73.0	7.9
15-19	20,155	7,730	5,819	1,911	11,366	1,059	38.4	24.7
20-24	16,933	14,022	12,579	1,443	2,200	711	82.8	10.3
Female	102,297	53,154	40,530	12,624	42,994	6,149	52.0	23.7
15-19	19,749	6,325	4,094	2,231	12,364	1,060	32.0	35.3
20-24	17,876	11,398	8,223	3,175	5,732	746	63.8	27.9

Source: Maldives Demographic and Health Survey, 2006

Dominance of the Tourism Sector

Tourism is the largest economic sector of the country, contributing 32.9% to GDP and employing the largest portion of the labor force. The dominance of the tourism industry has both positive and negative effects on young people. On the positive side, demand for tourism, hospitality and leisure services is income elastic and the demand for these services is likely to enjoy strong growth. Unfortunately, reliance on the sector makes the Maldivian economy highly vulnerable to fluctuations and variations in global economic and social conditions through their effect on tourism, and the transmission of these effects to the other related sectors.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ World Bank. 2011. "Higher Education in the Maldives: An Evolving Seascape." South Asia Human Development Sector. Report No. 36. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

**Table 2: Percent Distribution of Never-married Women and Men age 15-24
By current activity, by sex and age (Maldives, 2009)**

Age Group	Attending school only		Working only		Attending school and working		Neither attending school or working		Other	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
15-19	44.8	46.2	24.3	23.4	9.8	3.8	20.5	26.5	0.5	0.1
20-24	6.6	8.2	70.3	56.9	4.5	5.6	18.6	29.2	0.1	0

Source: Maldives Demographic and Health Survey, 2006

Young Men's Migration and Corollary Social Implications

The tourism sector in Malé and the resort and industrial islands have attracted the younger population (and mostly men) from less-developed atolls. Primary reasons for the predominance of men in the sector are: the social stigma of young unmarried women staying on resort islands for extended periods of time; perceived risks of women travelling alone; the high cost of transportation; and limited child care facilities.¹¹² This was confirmed in focus-group discussions with young and adult women in Mahibadhoo Island. For example, one participant noted: *“there is strong opposition from families and community members, led by community elders, to allowing female workers to work and remain on a resort island overnight.”*¹¹³

The fact that young men are forced to migrate and that young women are unable to do so contributes to a number of problems, including men being separated from families, young women being dependent on their parents and unable to become independent, tensions between young couples, and family breakdown and divorce.

Limited Job Opportunities for Young Women

Although data shows that young women are actively seeking work, rigid gender norms and expectations prevent them from seeking and finding employment. Focus-group discussions with women in Mahibadhoo and Maalhos Islands, for example, revealed that many young women, and especially those still living with their parents, have been actively discouraged or even restricted by their families from seeking jobs outside their homes. When asked if they would take an opportunity for full-time work, the young women stated that they would have to first balance family obligations with the possibility of outside work. Further, women prefer regular salary-based work as opposed to self-employment or informal house-based

¹¹² International Trade Union Confederation. 2009. “Internationally Recognized Core Labor Standards in the Maldives.” Report For the World Trade Organization General Council Review of the Trade Policies of Maldives. Executive Summary. Geneva, 26 and 28 October, 2009. Available: http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Trade_Policy_Review_Maldives_final_october_09.pdf

¹¹³ Information obtained in focus group discussions held with youth in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll. Discussions held on January 11, 2014.

work. The increasing level of religious fundamentalism and conservative thinking has also increased the barriers to women working.¹¹⁴

Beyond the rigid gender norms that dictate that women should stay home and tend to domestic duties, young women interviewed stated that they lack exposure to employment opportunities and have limited access to new job markets. Many young women had inspiring and ambitious ideas and plans for business start-ups or alternative career paths either outside or within the household, but had little understanding of how they might increase benefits and limit business risks. Focus-groups discussions with youth in all locations confirmed this point.

Traditional Employment Options for Men on the Islands

Maldivian islands are dependent on a seafaring economy, with fishing traditionally providing the main occupation for men in the atolls. Yet, findings from the focus-group discussions in Mahibadhoo Island indicate that “*there are negative perceptions about fishing... [and agricultural] ...activities as professions for people who haven’t studied enough.*”¹¹⁵ Similar sentiments were expressed during focus-group discussions in Mahibadhoo Maalhos and in Dharavandoo, and in a 2014 UNICEF supported youth study in the Maldives.¹¹⁶

‘Lost in Translation’ – Mismatch Between Skills and Experiences of Youth and Work Requirements

Due to the lack of well-educated Maldivians, the country faces a severe shortage of qualified personnel for technical, middle and senior management jobs. An estimated 100,000 expatriate workers in the country are in senior management positions in tourism, as well as banking, finance, trade and shipping. In addition, Maldives faces the challenge of producing human capital with the skills and competencies needed for a small multi-island nation to operate in the modern global economy. Employers in the country require ‘soft skills’ across sectors (tourism, banking, insurance, financial services, management, trade and marketing) which young people lack.

According to the World Bank, one of the primary obstacles preventing employment among educated youth is poor English language skills.¹¹⁷ Findings from the 2011 study on challenges and prospects of education in the Maldives concluded that the national assessments of learning outcomes at Grade 4 and Grade 7 show that English language learning levels are unsatisfactory: the mean score for English among students at grade 4 is

¹¹⁴ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2012. “ICPD Beyond 2014. Maldives Operational Review 2012. Progress, Challenges and the Way Forward.” Malé: UNFPA and the Government of Maldives, Department of National Planning. Available: <http://www.planning.gov.mv/publications/2013/ICPD%20Beyond%202014%20-%20Maldives%20Operational%20Review%202012-13.05.2013.pdf> (last accessed on January 30, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Focus-group discussions in Malé and in Mahibadhoo were conducted for this report by Piotr Pawlak, independent consultant for the World Bank.

¹¹⁶ Focus-group discussions in in Maalhos and in Dharavandoo were conducted by Natasha Leite, independent consultant for UNICEF. For more information, please see: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2014. “Youth in the Maldives: Challenges and Recommendations.” Draft. Malé: UNICEF (unpublished).

¹¹⁷ World Bank. 2010. “The Challenge of Youth Employment in Sri Lanka.” R. Gunatilaka, M. Mayer and M. Vodopivec (Eds.). Washington D.C.: World Bank. Pg. 4-5. Available: http://www.unicef.org/srilanka/challenge_youth_unemployment.pdf (last accessed on February 25, 2014).

just 32%, and at grade 7 it is 29%. These, according to the report, are low average scores, suggesting that learning levels in both primary education and lower secondary education are weak.¹¹⁸

Another issue is the mismatch between what employers expect and require in terms of job qualifications, practical skills and experience, and the real skills and experiences young people acquire. According to focus-group discussions with youth and adults in Mahibadhoo, the skills mismatch arises because at a basic level of education, *“the school curriculum does not provide the skills employers are looking for.”* As a result, private sector companies prefer already skilled foreign workers entering the Maldivian labor market rather than investing in or creating training opportunities for young Maldivians. Furthermore, there are limited opportunities for vocational training, skills development and on the job training, as well as limited career guidance in schools for Maldivian youth. If available, vocational training and employment-focused training programs focus predominately on male-dominated sectors such as fishery and tourism.

Finally, anecdotal evidence suggests that the reservation wage of youth in the Maldives may prevent young people from accepting jobs. The fact that key social services such as education and health are provided free to Maldivians may also serve as a disincentive to work. In a recent public statement, the Minister of Home Affairs, Umar Naseer, addressed these issues in light of the conclusion of the Blues for Youth Camp, which aimed at introducing youth aged 15 and 18 years to the job market. The Minister stated that there is no task too menial or lowly for a Maldivian: *“if doing the work earns you an income, and is a service unto the nation, then it is not too lowly for us.”*¹ He added that *“none of the work currently being conducted by foreigners in this country is either lowly or dirty work.”* According to news reports, the Minister urged Maldivian youth to partake in whatever work that may come their way: *“youth should keep in mind that our ancestors fulfilled all these tasks, did all this work, without employing any foreigners to do the work for them.”*

Voluntary Youth Unemployment

Interviews and focus groups conducted for this report suggest that youth in the Maldives are unwilling and discouraged to take on certain types of jobs. Findings indicate that parents would rather pay their sons and daughters not to work than to let them work in a job which they consider beneath them; a notable 50% of young people surveyed in the field-based research solely stated that they rely on their parents as their main source of income, with more young males (51%) than young females (47%) depending on their parents for income. The perceptions and attitudes of parents of what is a suitable job for their children are a key component of youth voluntary unemployment.

According to the Department of National Planning (2012), many young people in the Maldives remain discouraged from seeking employment and are not actively looking for

¹¹⁸ Aturupane, H. and M. Shojo. 2012. “Enhancing the Quality of Education in the Maldives. Challenges and Prospects.” South Asia: Human Development Unit. Report No. 51. Discussion Paper Series. World Bank. Available: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/04/05/000406484_20120405155733/Rendered/PDF/679180NWP00PUB07903B0Report00No.510.pdf (last accessed on February 2, 2014).

work. Focus-group discussions with youth in Malé, Mahibadhoo, Maalhos and in Dharavandoo revealed that because of their disappointment and frustration with the institutions and performance of elected and appointed officials, declining societal values and increasing mistrust, as well as a pre-existing perceptions of corruption and a lack of transparency in job recruitment, a large proportion of youth remain economically inactive and disengaged. Youth in the focus-groups discussions stated that, “*who you know has more influence in your employment chances than your actual qualifications.*”¹¹⁹ Further, there was an undeniable feeling that personal relations are almost the “*only*” criteria in a selection process for lucrative jobs, especially in the public sphere. This is consistent with findings from the 2011 Transparency International report on Maldives, which indicates that Maldivians, including the youth cohort, feel that overall corruption levels in the country have increased.¹²⁰

Youth Entrepreneurship

The Maldives has traditionally lacked a culture of entrepreneurship. According to interviews in Mahibadhoo Island conducted for this report, parents actively discourage young people’s entrepreneurship.¹²¹ In spite of this, the scope of income-generating opportunities available to young people and especially women in the Maldives appears to be improving. For instance, young women can be seen buying and selling goods in the markets or running shops, opening small tailoring stores or starting other small business ventures – something considered unimaginable and taboo several years ago. If entrepreneurship among young people is to be viable, however, capital, training and mentorship must be made available to guide them in developing and launching livelihoods and businesses.

¹¹⁹ Focus-group discussions in Malé and in Mahibadhoo were conducted by Piotr Pawlak, independent consultant for the World Bank, while focus-group discussions in Maalhos and in Dharavandoo were conducted by Natasha Leite, independent consultant for UNICEF. For more information, please see: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2014. “Youth in the Maldives: Challenges and Recommendations.” Draft. Malé: UNICEF (unpublished).

¹²⁰ Hardoon, D. and F. Heinrich. 2011. “Daily Lives and Corruption: Public Opinions in the Maldives.” Berlin: Transparency International. Available: <http://transparencymaldives.org/transparency/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/corruption.pdf> (last accessed on January 12, 2014).

¹²¹ Interview with Council President of the Alif Dhaal Atoll and Council Director of the Alif Dhaal Atoll. Interview held on January 11, 2014 in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll.

3.4 FAMILY STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Maldives is undergoing a period of rapid social transformation. Economic development, increasing consumerism and western influences, urbanization as well as internal migration, shifts in religious sentiments and democratization have shifted ideas and discourses surrounding gender, family and relationships.¹²² Various factors create new frontiers and influence the ways that youth in the Maldives experience and see their roles and responsibilities in relationship within their families and peers.

Family and relationships within the family are important for youth in the Maldives. The 2005 Youth Voices: Facts, Opinions and Solutions report shows that the youth in the Maldives have strong family bonds and are well respected by their peers. Over 90% of 4,002 youths surveyed felt that they receive adequate emotional support from their families and that they can communicate well with their parents; over 85% of the surveyed youth felt that their peers respect them.”¹²³

Indeed, a survey conducted for this report, which examined the relationships that young people have with their parents and siblings, showed very positive results in terms of family connections. According to the survey, 99% of young women described the relationship with their siblings (whether male or female) as happy, 97% of young men said they get along very well with siblings, and 90% of young women and 89% of young men interviewed said they enjoy their relationship with their mothers.

Yet, Maldivian youths’ experiences of family and household arrangements are also complex, multifaceted and varied, and many face a number of changes to - and challenges in - their engagement, roles and responsibilities in families, in partnerships and relationships, and in the broader context of their communities. Interviews with youth and other stakeholders suggest a shift among young people’s attitudes, from being community-focused to individualistic and self-centered. There is evidence of emerging inter-generational tensions as the divide widens between the experiences and aspirations of youth and older generations.

Inter-generational ‘Tensions’

“They [young people, especially male]...are unambitious and lazy, and think only about themselves.”¹²⁴ - Council member, Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll.

The Maldives today is facing a transition of ‘youth’ identity, which is common among youth living in globalized societies. This new ‘youth identity’ is characterized by a confusion between liberal or conservative, or for example, urban and rural, Western and non-Western principles. For many young people this means freely enjoying a culture of immediate gratification. In that way, materialism, consumerism and individualism clash with messages

¹²² Fulu, E. 2013. “Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives.” Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

¹²³ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2005. “Maldives: Youth Voices Report 2005.” Malé: UNFPA.

¹²⁴ Interview with members of the Alif Dhaal Atoll council. Interview held on January 11, 2014 in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll.

of traditionalism, family and community, resulting in ‘tensions and struggles’ between generations.

Focus-group discussions conducted for this report with youth in Mahibadhoo Island shed light on the debate between the expectations and pressures young people face from their parents, teachers, guardians and other elders, and their own desires and goals. Older generations (adults) frequently see youth as ‘unambitious,’ ‘lazy’ and ‘disconnected,’ and focused on ‘me’ rather than ‘us,’ while the younger generations, especially those young men and women who have studied or worked in Malé and beyond, see themselves as part of a global village, fast-paced and modern society, where individual aspirations overtake family traditions. Older generations may thus place significant pressure on young women and men to firmly adhere to traditional customs and hierarchies which may not be fully aligned with the current reality of youth. As a consequence, according to focus group discussions, young women and men are not provided with alternative role models who show them how to bridge their ‘new modern and emancipated reality’ with traditional customs and norms.

While family-relations are of central importance to youth in the Maldives, and marriage is a key component of the transition into adulthood, marriage patterns globally and in the Maldives are changing. Young men and women are waiting until they are older to get married, they are marrying individuals closer to their age, and they have more of a say with regard to whom they marry.¹²⁵ According to the survey conducted for this report, 83% of youth surveyed remain unmarried; more young men (90%) than young women (76%) remain unmarried. The survey findings also revealed an emerging trend among youth towards marriage: 56% of young people surveyed said that the reason to leave their homes and to migrate out of the atolls into Malé was not to form a family or to marry (only 3.5% of respondents identified this reason), but to pursue education (and employment). However, even with the recent changes in terms of who and when one will marry, some aspects of the marriage process continue to remain unchanged, such as the requirement that a young groom is to be economically stable, possess a job, and among other stipulations, to provide decent housing for his family.

“What a woman wants to be is different from what men [...and adult family members.....] think ‘she should be.’”¹²⁶ - A young adolescent male, Mahibadhoo, Alif Dhaal Atoll

Intergenerational tensions exist not just between adults and youth, but also within the youth cohort. Focus-group discussions in Mahibadhoo Island revealed a difference in attitudes between adolescent boys (ages 17-19) and their older male peers (ages 23-27). For instance, younger boys believe that “girls should have the same opportunities like boys.” They believe that as a young person of any gender, “you can do many things in life” and they stated that it is very important “to be educated: having quality and continuum of education, be financially independent and have a healthy life.” Discussions with older male youth (23-27) on the same

¹²⁵ Barker, G., and P. Pawlak. 2011. “Men’s Participation in Care Work, in Families, and in Gender Equality in the Contemporary World.” In *Men and Families and Policy in a Changing World*. New York: United Nations.

¹²⁶ Female participant of a focus-group discussion held in Mahibadhoo, Alif Dhaal Atoll, on January 11, 2014.

island revealed that while younger youth prioritize values such as independence and social justice, the older youth prioritize values related to traditional power and gender relations, “having good behavior: praying regularly; having a job that keeps family together and pays bills.”

Changing Patterns in Family Formation

In the Maldives, the formation of a marriage does not mean that a new household is formed. Unmarried youth, regardless of age, generally stay with their parents, both for customary and financial reasons. Traditionally, Maldivians, even after reaching adult ages, do not move out of the family home unless they are entering marriage, in which case, in most instances, the new married couple continues to share the household of the parents of one of the spouses. According to the survey conducted for this report, 52% of married young males live in their parent’s home, while 46% of married young females live in their parent’s home. Marriage often increases the social capital of young people through networking with a new family and the expansion of an extended family and kinship network. This may lead to new social and economic opportunities via families and relatives of brides and grooms.

Early Marriage and Parenting skills

As noted above, young women and men in the Maldives experience challenges in terms of unemployment and underemployment, continuing education in their communities outside Malé, finding a suitable place to live and to raise a family, and if and when married with children, considerable parenting challenges – all of which have a considerable influence on their transition into adulthood. Thus, the result of delaying marriage, for example, due to limited accumulation of capital, in a culture where it is a fundamental component of the transition into adulthood, can be seen as a form of exclusion that could generate new social and economic difficulties.¹²⁷

Box 5. Strengthening Youth Parenting Skills - Marriage Awareness Programme

To address the problem of poor parenting skills among youth, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Family Court introduced a regulation requiring all couples intending to marry to attend a one-day Marriage Awareness Programme. The awareness program intends to provide the information needed for a marriage based on religious and social aspects. Basic information about marriage and the importance of marital life and SH issues (such as STIs and contraception) are provided and available to both married and unmarried couples. According to the Ministry of Justice’s announcement, from August 1st 2007, no couple can marry without submitting a certificate of participation in an awareness program.

Source: Miadhu Online News, August 5th, 2007: “Couples need to attend the awareness program.” Available: <http://www.miadhu.com/2007/08/local-news/couples-need-to-attend-the-awareness-program-justice-3211/> (last accessed on May 6, 2014).

¹²⁷ Barker, G., and P. Pawlak. 2011. “Men’s Participation in Care Work, in Families, and in Gender Equality in the Contemporary World.” In *Men and Families and Policy in a Changing World*. New York: United Nations. Page 24.

High Rates of Divorce and Female-headed Households

“In this globalized era, more and more women are entering the work force. High standards of living necessitate women supplement their husband’s income. However, there are no childcare facilities. And certain religious elements see women in the workforce – or active in public space – in a negative light. All of this can create stress within families and lead to divorce.”¹²⁸

Divorce is common in the Maldives. According to the Department of National Planning, 5,699 couples married in 2012, but 3,011 couples were divorced in the same year. A general lack of research on Maldives’ high divorce rate makes it difficult to pinpoint exact reasons for divorce, although rapid urbanization in Male, housing congestion and a broader lack of housing for the growing population may all contribute. A large household combined with the relatively small size of houses creates unhealthy living conditions for newlyweds and their relatives, with people often sleeping in shifts. It is common to find whole families living in single rooms, which double as a kitchen and living room. Such living conditions place great strain on families, sometimes leading to family break up. Additionally, in her recent statement, State Minister for Gender and Family Dr. Haala Hameed said that the recent increase in divorce rates may be due to stress within families as women enter the work force.¹²⁹

At 35%, Maldives has one of the highest rates of female-headed households in the world (2010 data).¹³⁰ These high rates of female-headed households are linked with divorce rates and the large number of males who are leaving their families and households to work outside their resident islands, usually in the fishing industry, in resorts or elsewhere.

¹²⁸ State Minister for Gender and Family Dr. Haala Hameed as quoted in Minivan – Independent News for the Maldives. See: Rasheed, Z. “Maldives Holds Guinness World Record for Divorce Rate.” Minivan News. 22 January, 2014. Available:

<http://minivannews.com/society/maldives-holds-guinness-world-record-for-divorce-rate-75770>

¹²⁹ Rasheed, Z. “Maldives Holds Guinness World Record for Divorce Rate.” Minivan News. 22 January, 2014. Available:

<http://minivannews.com/society/maldives-holds-guinness-world-record-for-divorce-rate-75770>

¹³⁰ Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2012. “Laying the Groundwork for Gender Equality in the Maldives – 2012.” Available:

<http://www.adb.org/themes/gender/gdcf-case-studies/laying-groundwork-gender-equality-maldives> (last accessed on January 29, 2014).

3.5 GANGS AND VIOLENCE

The emergence and rapid increase of gangs, as well as escalating rates of gang-related crimes has raised public concern over the issue of youth violence.¹³¹ Research also points to the high rate of gender-based violence that Maldivian woman, including young women, face in their homes and schools.¹³² Gendered and peer related school-based violence including bullying, social discrimination and exclusion have also been reported throughout the country. New phenomena such as cyber-bullying and ‘revenge porn’ are now present in the daily lives of young men and women in the Maldives. Factors such as income inequality, rapid demographic changes in the youth population, modernization, urbanization and globalization, and gangs and drugs are a potent mixture that has increased the likelihood of youth violence worldwide.¹³³ This section reviews the causes, scale, nature and manifestation of different forms of youth violence in the Maldives.

Youth, Gangs and Gang-related Violence

“You can’t compare us (Maldivian gangs) to the ones in the UK or to other countries. We are very different. Maldivian gang violence can be much more brutal and frequent, as this is a small community and people can’t hide in places for that long.” – The Asia Foundation¹³⁴

“[Because of] High levels of domestic violence, divorce and broken homes, joining gangs has become a popular choice for Maldivian youth looking outside of traditional family structures for support and protection.” – The Asia Foundation¹³⁵

In the context of the Maldives, gangs are defined as ‘groupings’ of young people that may potentially be engaged in violence, but are not necessarily violent in nature. There are reports of gang-like groupings of peers formed on the basis of sport club participation, community, neighborhood or island identity, and geographic territory. Although these groupings may engage in serious and organized actions to carry out illegal activities, they may also have primarily social purposes (often resulting from limited prospects and social activities available to youth) and thus may only occasionally become involved in harmful activities such as bullying or fights. As of 2012, between 20 and 30 different gangs were reportedly operating in Malé, with 50 to 400 members in each group, and most members being male and averaging 25 years of age.¹³⁶ Findings from the field-based research conducted for this report show that among 402 young men and young women surveyed, 4% said they belong to

¹³¹ National Archives and Records Administration. “Background Notes on Countries of the World: Maldives.” Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. Available <http://www.gpo.gov/> (Last accessed on January 18, 2014).

¹³² Fulu, E. 2007. “The Maldives Study on Women’s Health and Life Experiences. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses to violence.” Government of Maldives, Ministry of Gender and Family; and Fulu, E. 2004. “Gender-based Violence in the Maldives: What We Know So Far - A report on the findings of qualitative research on GBV carried out by the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security in 2004.”

¹³³ World Health Organization (WHO). 2002. “Fact Sheet on Youth Violence.” Available: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/youthviolencefacts.pdf (last accessed on March 5, 2014).

¹³⁴ The Asia Foundation and Maldives Institute for Psychological Services, Training and Research. 2012. “Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé.” Colombo: The Asia Foundation. Available: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/GangViolenceReportFINAL.pdf> (last accessed on January 31, 2014).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

a gang, while 32% said they had friends in gangs and 17% reported they had family members who belong to a gang. The survey also probed the ways which young people had been introduced to gangs: according to respondents, 55% had joined gangs in their neighborhood, 20% in school, 15% through sports groups, and 10% via friends.

In recent years, gang violence has been rising and is currently considered a serious risk factor for the safety and security of youth in the Maldives.¹³⁷ Inter- and intra-gang violence and crime have become prevalent in the country, requiring heightened police interventions.

As to the reasons that youth join gangs in the Maldives, there are a number of interrelated factors, as follows:

- **Unemployment.** Globally, research points to the association between male unemployment and engagement in delinquency, violence and antisocial behaviors.¹³⁸ In the Maldives, a qualitative study conducted in Malé with 131 gang members revealed that 63% of those gang members are currently unemployed, and 52% have never been employed: *‘I have tried to get a real job but I have not had any luck. Being in the gang allows me to earn some money. If I get a proper job I will leave the gang life.’*¹³⁹ The study suggests that unemployment and ‘wanting a better lifestyle’ but ‘not being able to achieve it without work or through legitimate work,’ may be major factors in driving youth into gangs in the country.¹⁴⁰
- **Drug Use and Violence.** The relationship between drug use and violence has been well documented globally, and in the Maldives, recent data from the Maldives Police Service shows a rapid and concerning increase in drug-related offences. According to the Maldives Police Service website, drug-related offences increased from 1,824 in 2011, to 2,534 in 2012 and 3,969 in 2013.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the 2012 Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé reports that 54% of 131 surveyed gang members reported they were currently using drugs and 44% reported that they were engaged in the sale of drugs.¹⁴² Another 63% reported having been detained by the police at some point – and amongst those detained, 38% had served a prison sentence, and 18% reported having been released from prison under conditions of parole,

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Barker, G., and P. Pawlak. 2011. “Men’s Participation in Care Work, in Families, and in Gender Equality in the Contemporary World.” In *Men and Families and Policy in a Changing World*. New York: United Nations; Barker, G. and C. Ricardo. 2005. “Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence.” Social Development Working Paper No. 26. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

¹³⁹ Statement from a gang member in Malé obtained in a rapid assessment study on gangs in the Maldives. Please see: Asia Foundation and Maldives Institute for Psychological Services, Training and Research. 2012. “Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé.” Colombo: The Asia Foundation. Available: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/GangViolenceReportFINAL.pdf> (last accessed on January 31, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ For example, please see the Strain Theory, which suggests that youth join gangs because they want a better lifestyle, but are unable to achieve this through legitimate work: Goldstein, A.P. 1991. “Delinquent Gangs: A Psychological Perspective.” Champaign, IL: Research Press. Also, please see: Barker, G., and P. Pawlak. 2011. “Men’s Participation in Care Work, in Families, and in Gender Equality in the Contemporary World.” In *Men and Families and Policy in a Changing World*. New York: United Nations; and Barker, G. and C. Ricardo. 2005. “Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence.” Social Development Working Paper No. 26. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

¹⁴¹ Maldives Police Service. “Crime Statistics 2012.” Available: <http://www.police.gov.mv/#eservice> (last accessed on February 13, 2014).

¹⁴² Asia Foundation and Maldives Institute for Psychological Services, Training and Research. 2012. “Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé.” Colombo: The Asia Foundation. Available: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/GangViolenceReportFINAL.pdf> (last accessed on January 31, 2014).

presidential pardon or under the ‘*second chance*’ opportunity.¹⁴³ The 2011 Prison Assessment and Proposed Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders study revealed that 66% of 576 prisoners who took part in the study were sentenced on drug convictions, particularly for the usage and possession of small quantities (66.0%).¹⁴⁴

- **Proving Manhood.** The need to create acceptable alternatives, to break away, to be socially accepted, and to gain influence and power may lead young people to participate in gangs. Further, evidence from other countries suggest that for young men, participation in gangs and the use of violence is a way to become a man - achieving a sense of socially respected manhood is not perceived to be attainable otherwise.¹⁴⁵ Through gang participation and gang-related activities, young men find companionship with other male peers, and in some cases, male role models and substitute families. As a young gang member in Male said, “...gangs are much better than my own family...they are there when I need them.”¹⁴⁶ Many young men who use violence on other men may do so because they feel pressured to prove their manhood.¹⁴⁷
- **Political Violence.** In the Maldives, the Asia Foundation study on gangs suggests that the increase in the number of gangs is directly tied to political parties, as these political actors attempt to gain influence and power by aligning their parties with certain gangs. Political groups may also “hire” gangs in exchange for money, alcohol, or drugs to do specific “jobs,” such as participating in political protests, voting, starting political riots, destroying property or injuring a third party.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2011. “Prison Assessment and Proposed Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders Report.” Government of Maldives and UNDP.

¹⁴⁵ Barker, G. and C. Ricardo. 2005. “Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence.” Social Development Working Paper No. 26. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

¹⁴⁶ A young gang member interviewed as part of the situation assessment study in Malé. Asia Foundation and Maldives Institute for Psychological Services, Training and Research. 2012. “Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé.” Colombo: The Asia Foundation. Available: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/GangViolenceReportFINAL.pdf> (last accessed on January 31, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Women (UN Women). 2012. “Working With Men and Boys to Promote Gender Equality: A Review of the Field and Emerging Approaches.” Expert paper prepared by Dean Peacock and Gary Barker for the Expert Group Meeting on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls. Bangkok, Thailand; 17-20 September 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Box 6: Impact of Anti-Gang Violence Act in 2010

Prior to the enactment of the Anti-Gang Violence Act in 2010, criminal offences committed by a gang or group were not recognized as a distinct category of criminal offences. Section 1 of the act specifically criminalizes and sets out specific penalties for the creation, operation and the carrying out of criminal offences by a group or a gang of individuals.

Section 23 of this act defines a gang as “*any group or team created with a primary objective of conducting a criminal activity.*”¹⁴⁹ However, according to the Asia Foundation’s Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé study, “*youth make the choice of joining a group or a gang for a number of reasons that may or may not include the intention to carry out criminal acts. In a situation where an individual commits a criminal offence, however minor, he/she is faced with the dilemma of not only being penalized for the commission of the offence but also for his affiliations with a group or gang that may have no connection with the offence that has been committed.*” The report concludes that the Anti-Gang Violence Act in 2010 further marginalizes and pushes convicted individuals into a life of crime rather than supporting and rehabilitating them.

Violence Against Young Women and Girls

Consistent with other countries in the region, young Maldivian women face high levels of violence in public spaces, in schools, in their communities and within their homes.¹⁴⁹ Aggregate data from a 2007 Women’s Health and Life Experiences study shows that 14.5% of girls aged 15-17 had experienced some form of sexual violence at least once in their lifetime; sexual abuse before the age of 15 was found to be relatively common. The same study indicates that at the national level, 12.2% of women aged 15-49 had been sexually abused before the age of 15, and in Malé the rate - 16.3% - was even higher.¹⁵⁰ There are also reports of the abuse and rape of 18-24 year old women, which resulted in unwanted pregnancy, which is particularly serious given that premarital relations are illegal.¹⁵¹ The issue of pregnancy due to the sexual abuse of young children with disabilities is an even further disturbing social reality.¹⁵²

Intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of violence against women in the country. Initial results from a study on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses to violence show that 1 in 5 women aged 15-49 experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, and 1 in 8 (12%) women aged 15-49 reported experiencing childhood

¹⁴⁹ Findings from the study on Maldivian women’s health and life experiences clearly indicate that the problem lies within the space of the family: male family members, in particular fathers or step-fathers, were the most commonly mentioned perpetrator of non-partner physical violence among women ages 15-49. Please see: Fulu, E. 2007. “The Maldives Study on Women’s Health and Life Experiences. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses to violence.” Government of Maldives, Ministry of Gender and Family; and Fulu, E. 2004. “Gender-based Violence in the Maldives: What We Know So Far - A report on the findings of qualitative research on GBV carried out by the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security in 2004.”

¹⁵⁰ Fulu, E. 2007. “The Maldives Study on Women’s Health and Life Experiences. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses to violence.” Government of Maldives, Ministry of Gender and Family.

¹⁵¹ These reports have been compiled through the review of evidence from medico-legal records at the IGMH for the purpose of the UNFPA report. Please see: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2011. “Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives.” Malé: UNFPA.

¹⁵² United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2011. “Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives.” Malé: UNFPA.

sexual abuse before reaching 15 years of age.¹⁵³ Combining physical and/or sexual violence by partners and non-partners, from the age of 15, the study found that more than 1 in 4 women (28.4%) have experienced partner or non-partner violence, or both.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, among girls under 18 years of age who took part in the study, 7.3% reported physical and/or sexual partner violence, 22% reported emotional abuse by a partner, and 2.7% reported physical violence by someone other than an intimate partner after the age of 15.¹⁵⁵

Focus-group discussions conducted for this report further revealed a phenomenon referred to as “*revenge porn*.” According to focus-group discussions in Malé, Maalhos and in the Dharavandoo Islands, this form of violence involves the blackmailing of young women for sexual favors by their former partners who possess intimate videos or photos of them. Young women have expressed “*emotional distress*” related to such blackmailing.¹⁵⁶ School officials and parents are generally unaware of this problem, and the current legal framework does not protect these victims who are mainly young women.

VAWG in the Maldives is a complex, multifaceted issue. Factors which contribute to its prevalence and acceptance in society include the following:

- Concepts of family honor, sexual purity, fear of re-victimization and shame from disclosure often justify even the most violent or discriminatory actions against Maldivian women and girls. There is broad tolerance towards violence at home, school and in the community.¹⁵⁷ In the focus-group discussions conducted for this report, in Mahibadhoo Island for instance, young women stated that ‘forced’ sexual contact or exposure to sexually inappropriate behavior happens very frequently among young people, but “*many of these incidents are quickly dismissed due to the stigma associated with being involved.*”¹⁵⁸ Some forms of VAWG are fully denied; for example, in 2012, a Maldivian academic at the Maldives National University proclaimed, “*There is no such thing as marital rape. This is as clear as ‘black and white.’*”¹⁵⁹
- Even when acknowledged or recognized, there is general public acceptance that VAWG is a private issue rather than one which is public.¹⁶⁰ According to statistics from UNICEF relating to the period 2001-2007, 70% of girls and women aged 15-49

¹⁵³ Fulu, E. 2007. “The Maldives Study on Women’s Health and Life Experiences. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses to violence.” Government of Maldives, Ministry of Gender and Family.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Several youth from Malé, Mahibadhoo, Maalhos and Dharavandoo referred to “revenge porn” in focus group discussions. Focus-group discussions in Malé and in Mahibadhoo were conducted by Piotr Pawlak, independent consultant for the World Bank, while focus-group discussions in Maalhos and in Dharavandoo were conducted by Natasha Leite, independent consultant for UNICEF. For more information, please see also: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2014. “Youth in the Maldives: Challenges and Recommendations.” Draft. Malé: UNICEF (unpublished).

¹⁵⁷ For more information on the acceptance of disciplinary approaches in school settings in South Asia, please see Pawlak, P. and J. Sass. 2014. “School-related Gender-Based Violence in the Asia-Pacific Region.” Bangkok: UNESCO.

¹⁵⁸ Abdulghafoor, H. 2012. “Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.” Malé: Hope for Women.

¹⁵⁹ The Domestic Violence Prevention Act was described as a law that will exacerbate issues, rather than offer solutions, by an academic at a lecture which was given at the Maldives National University, Faculty of Sharia and Law on April 25, 2012, a few weeks after the passage of the DV Prevention Act. Described in: Abdulghafoor, H. 2012. “Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.” Malé: Hope for Women.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2004. “Gender Issues in the Criminal Justice System of the Maldives.” University of Melbourne, 2 September 2004.

surveyed think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances.¹⁶¹ Consequently, in the Maldives violence against women perpetrated by an intimate partner is perceived as a private matter only and as an issue that should remain in the family.¹⁶²

- There are widespread cultural taboos surrounding the discussion of sexual experiences, whether forced or not, including the extreme societal reluctance to recognize that young unmarried women engage in premarital sex. The legal consequences of premarital sex and criminalization of pregnancy outside the marriage are also a deterrent. For instance, on February 25, 2013, the Juvenile Court sentenced a 15-year-old victim of sexual abuse to 100 lashes and eight months of house arrest after she confessed to having sex outside of marriage. The man with whom the girl said she had sexual relations denied the charges and received no sentence. The girl's confession to extramarital sex occurred during an investigation into reports that her stepfather had repeatedly abused her sexually, and had fathered the child whose dead body was found in the outside toilet of their home. Authorities charged the stepfather with sexual abuse and murder, and the girl's mother was charged with concealing a crime. On August 21, after an appeal from the government following domestic and international pressure, the High Court annulled the sentence against the girl.¹⁶³
- According to some, increasing levels of religious fundamentalism and conservative thinking has worsened the situation of women and young girls in the Maldives, including VAWG. As Shadiya Ibrahim, currently UNFPA Assistant Representative and a member of the newly formed Gender Advocacy Working Group¹⁶⁴ said, *“being a woman is harder now. The religious Wabhabist scholars preach more forcefully than anyone else can....[...]...and no one can make the argument to have a more liberal, a more positive attitude towards women. Day by day, it is becoming harder for women to live in this country.”*¹⁶⁵
- Interrelated factors such as gender inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes, national and international policies and economics, globalization, poverty, organized crime, war and conflict and media have been shown to contribute to the risks of

¹⁶¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2009. "Progress for Children: A Report Card on Child Protection. New York: UNICEF.

¹⁶² United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2012. "ICPD Beyond 2014. Maldives Operational Review 2012. Progress, Challenges and the Way Forward." Malé: UNFPA and the Government of Maldives, Department of National Planning. Available:

<http://www.planning.gov.mv/publications/2013/ICPD%20Beyond%202014%20-%20Maldives%20Operational%20Review%202012-13.05.2013.pdf> (last accessed on January 30, 2014). Also, see conclusion from focus group discussions conducted with women ages 15-49 in Malé, between April and July 2004: Fulu, E. 2004. "Gender-based Violence in the Maldives: What We Know So Far - A report on the findings of qualitative research on GBV carried out by the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security in 2004;" also in

Fulu, E. 2007. "The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses to violence." Government of Maldives, Ministry of Gender and Family.

¹⁶³ U.S. Department of State. 2013. "Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013." Available:

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (last accessed on March 20, 2014).

¹⁶⁴ Gender Advocacy Working Group is a group of women and men promoting gender equality and women's participation in the areas of economic, political and legal development in the Maldives. Through advocacy and capacity building, the group also works to eliminate violence against women in the country. For more information, please see:

http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/filemanager/files/maldives/gawg_guidelines_form_3.pdf

¹⁶⁵ The Sunday Morning Herald. 2012. "Maldives Women Face More Repression Under a Rising Tide of Religious Fundamentalism, Reports Ben Doherty from Male." 25 January 2012. Available: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/female-circumcision-fear-as-fundamentalists-roll-back-womens-rights-20120124-1qflv.html> (last accessed on March 12, 2014).

violence for women and girls.¹⁶⁶ In the case of the Maldives, in her recent book examining issues of domestic violence, globalization, gender and Islam in the Maldives, Emma Fulu argues, *“the country, a previously economically and politically insular country, has opened up to the world and global flows of ideas, discourses, capital and people are having an impact on all levels of society – and such social changes are most profound for women, exposing them to greater discrimination and oppression.”*¹⁶⁷ She also notes that *“domestic violence in the Maldives is increasing and will continue to do so if the current patterns for social changes persist.”*

- Protocols and mechanisms to deal with issues of domestic violence have recently been developed but are still limited in their effectiveness. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act, which was passed by the People’s Majlis on 9th April 2012, was a milestone in this regard; according to gender experts working in the Maldives, the act meets international standards. However, numerous challenges to the implementation of this law exist, including a lack of capacity and resources, and social resistance to the law.^{168 169} Moreover, the law does not specifically address the issue of marital rape. The new Child Sex Abuse Act (2009) categorizes child sex offences for the first time in the Maldives; however, under Article 14, if an adult is legally married to a child under Islamic Sharia, none of the offences specified in the act will be considered a crime.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Joe-Cannon, I. (Ed.) and the Coalition against Trafficking in Women 2006. “Primer on the Male Demand for Prostitution.” North Amherst, MA: Coalition against Trafficking in Women. Available: <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/PRIMER.pdf>.

¹⁶⁷ Fulu, E. 2013. “Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives.” Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

¹⁶⁸ Abdulghafoor, H. 2012. “Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.” Malé: Hope for Women.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Fulu, E. 2013. “Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives.” Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Box 7. Corporal Punishment at Home

Corporal punishment is lawful in the home. There is no legal defense for its use by parents in the Penal Code 1968 (amended 2002), but legal provisions against violence and abuse are not interpreted as prohibiting corporal punishment of children. In information provided to the Human Rights Committee in 2012, the Government asserted that the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child (1991) “prohibits corporal punishment in homes, schools and the penal system of any person under the age of 18.”

In fact, article 18 of the Law prohibits only punishment of a degree which is considered harmful to a child: “No child shall, even as a measure of discipline, be subjected to punishment which may cause physical injury or which may be detrimental to the health of the child.” In addition to stating that all corporal punishment is prohibited, the Government confirmed that it had “identified the actions and measures to prohibit all corporal punishment in all settings including law reform and an anti-corporal punishment campaign is planned for 2013.”

Source: 5 July 2012, CCPR/C/MDV/Q/1/Add.1, Written replies to the Human Rights Committee.

Violence Against Young Men and Boys

Although less visible and understood, young men and adolescent boys are also at risk, and do experience various forms of violence.¹⁷¹ Like women, young men typically do not seek help when they experience violence, because of the stigma associated with being seen as weak, and more specifically in case of the Maldives, due to the general lack of youth-focused services and health centers available to them. In the focus-group discussions in Mahibadhoo, young men noted the prevalence of physical abuse, referring not only to fights among male peers, but also to the physical punishments they face from their own families so that they may to comply with certain norms and behavior. Violence against adolescent boys and young men stems from many of the same underlying causes as violence against women and girls: social norms, gender roles and relations, and gendered or generational power inequalities.

Violence at Home

Young people in the Maldives experience various forms of violence at home. Findings from the 2007 Women’s Health and Life Experiences study indicate that the problem of violence lies in the family: the most commonly mentioned perpetrators of non-partner physical violence among women ages 15-49 were male family members, particularly fathers or step-fathers.¹⁷² The data also shows that girls are at greatest risk of sexual abuse by male family members and male acquaintances.¹⁷³

Violence experienced by young people at home has serious consequences. Several theories support a link between the family environment and violent behavior. For instance, attachment theory argues that children with insecure and negative attachment with their caregiver at home may develop interpersonal problems outside the home.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, social learning theory contends that children who observe and experience violence within the

¹⁷¹ Barker, G. and P. Pawlak. 2012. “Hidden Violence Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Adolescent Boys.” Briefing Paper. Washington, D.C.: MenCare.

¹⁷² Fulu, E. 2007. “The Maldives Study on Women’s Health and Life Experiences. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses to violence.” Government of Maldives, Ministry of Gender and Family.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Muuss, R.E. 1996. “Theories of Adolescence (6th Edition).” New York: McGraw-Hill.

family are likely to accept aggression as a legitimate way to interact with others.¹⁷⁵ The International Labour Organization lists family related risks, including weakened family or community networks, the absence of parental figures, a history of sexual abuse within families, witnessing or being victim to domestic violence, HIV/AIDS infection in the family, and practices of prostitution among family members as vulnerability factors for young men and women's risks of sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁷⁶ Too often, violence remains undetected, unreported, overlooked or even tolerated and accepted in school and at home - the very social institutions where young people are expected to be safe, protected and empowered.

Violence in Schools

There is some evidence suggesting that schools in the Maldives are often a space where young people are exposed to rigid, violent, and inequitable attitudes and behaviors, resulting in physical or emotional violence, bullying, discrimination, harassment and other forms of violence. An unpublished large scale UNICEF study (2009) found that 47% of children had experienced physical or emotional punishment, including at school.¹⁷⁷ Some 30% of children at secondary school had been hit by at least one of their caregivers, 21% with an object, and 8% of school students had been physically punished by their teachers.¹⁷⁸ According to field research conducted for this report, 8% of respondents stated that someone from school had physically abused them.

In many settings across the region, violence in schools is seen as inevitable,¹⁷⁹ and disciplinary actions such as verbal discrimination, corporal punishment, and actions that exclude or isolate students are seen as a means of discipline, and are often taken for granted as an excuse to enforce obedience.¹⁸⁰ According to the survey conducted for this report, 1 in 4 surveyed youth reported being sent home from school as a result of carrying a mobile phone to school, not maintaining the rule on short hair (for boys), or for using disrespectful language with teachers and school fights. A disproportionately high number of young males (40%) reported that they were sent home in comparison to young females (12%). Of the young people surveyed, 7% stated that they were suspended from school at least once. More young males (12%) were suspended from school at least once in comparison to young females (4%).

¹⁷⁵ Simons, R.I., Lin, K.H., and L.C. Gordon. 1998. "Socialization in the Family of Origin and Male Dating Violence: A Prospective Study." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60: Pg. 467-478.

¹⁷⁶ International Labour Organization (ILO). 2012. "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children." Available: <http://www.ilo.org/ipsec/areas/CSEC/lang-en/index.htm> (last accessed on February 8, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ The study involved almost 17,035 people in 2,500 households and 2,000 children in schools.

¹⁷⁸ The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children. 2013. "The Maldives – Country Report." Available: <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/reports/maldives.html> refers to these statistics as reported in a Minivan News article from 21 February, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Leach, F., Dunne, M. and F. Salvi. 2013. "School-related Gender-based Violence: A Global Review of Current Issues and Approaches in Policy, Programming and Implementation Responses to School-related Gender-based Violence (SRGBV) for the Education Sector." Background research paper prepared for UNESCO. University of Sussex; Contreras, M., Heilman, B., Barker, G., Singh, A., Verma, R., and J. Bloomfield. 2012. "Bridges to Adulthood: Understanding the lifelong influence of men's childhood experiences of violence. Analyzing data from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)." Washington DC: International Center for Research on Women.

¹⁸⁰ Mishra, N., Thakur, K.K., Koirala, R., Shrestha, D., Poudel, R. and R. Jha. 2010. "Corporal Punishment in Nepalese School Children: Facts, Legalities and Implications." *Journal of Nepal Pediatric Society*, Vol. 30 Issue 2, Pg. 98-109.

Focus-group discussions conducted for this report in Malé, and in Mahibadhoo, Maalhos and Dharavandoo Islands revealed that there were concerns about strict and conservative school management, as well as conservative teachers who do not encourage progressive ideas and independent thinking among students, but rather utilize the “suspension order” - a policy of exclusion towards students with views that are “too liberal.”¹⁸¹ In this way, students are deterred from participating actively in class and seeking academic excellence. This in turn creates a stressful and intimidating learning environment, lowers concentration and motivation, and contributes to lower academic achievement and overall poor performance. As a result, such students simply do not return to school. Even the threat of violence often results in irregular attendance, dropout, truancy, poor school performance, and low self-esteem.

Box 8. Corporal Punishment in Schools and Alternative Care Settings

There is no explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools. Article 10 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child 1991 states that punishment in school “must be appropriate to the age of the child and should not be physically or psychologically harmful to the child.” The Ministry of Education has stated that corporal punishment should not be used, but the draft Penal Code introduces a legal defense for the use of corporal punishment by teachers. An Education Bill has been under discussion since 2009: it was reviewed by the Committee on National Development in October 2012, and recommendations for further amendments were made but no detailed information on the proposed provisions is available. Corporal punishment is also lawful in alternative care settings. In 2010, regulations for children’s homes were being drafted, which would reportedly prohibit corporal punishment, but as of today, no actions have been taken.

Source: National Action Plan to Prohibit All Corporal Punishment, SAEVAC Workshop on Legal Reform and Corporal Punishment, November 2010, Kathmandu.

Bullying

In the Maldives, bullying captured the attention of the media in 2005, following the suicide of a student who had been bullied. A person is bullied when she or he is exposed repeatedly over time to aggressive behavior that intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort through physical contact, verbal attacks, and fighting or psychological manipulation.¹⁸² Boys are more likely to be both the perpetrators and targets of bullying, especially direct (i.e. physical) bullying, in addition to indirect bullying.¹⁸³ The survey conducted for this report revealed

¹⁸¹ Focus-group discussions in Malé and Mahibadhoo were conducted by Piotr Pawlak, independent consultant for the World Bank, while focus-group discussions in Maalhos and in Dharavandoo were conducted by Natasha Leite, independent consultant for UNICEF. For more information, please see: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2014. “Youth in the Maldives: Challenges and Recommendations.” Draft. Malé: UNICEF (unpublished).

¹⁸² Bullying involves an imbalance of power and can include teasing, taunting, and use of hurtful nicknames, physical violence or social exclusion. A bully can operate alone or within a group of peers. Bullying may be direct, such as one child demanding money or possessions from another, or indirect, such as a group of students spreading rumors about another. Cyber bullying is harassment through e-mail, cell phones, text messages and defamatory websites. Children may be more vulnerable to bullying if they live with a disability, express a sexual preference different from the mainstream, or come from a minority ethnic or cultural group or a certain socio-economic background. Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (n.d.) “Health Education - Homophobic Bullying.” Available: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/health-education/homophobic-bullying/bullying/>

¹⁸³ Forero, R., McLellan, L., Rissel, C. and A. Bauman. 1999. “Bullying Behavior and Psychosocial Health Among School Students in New South Wales, Australia: Cross Sectional Survey.” *British Medical Journal*, 319, 344-334; Olewus, D. 1993. “Bullying at School.” Oxford: Blackwell.

that 1 out of 5 young people surveyed stated that they have been bullied in schools. Of 223 15-19 year olds interviewed who are currently in school or have recently finished, 6% indicated that have been bullied on most days (this was much higher than the percentage of those in the 20-24 age group who have been bullied – 1%).

Further, the 2012 Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé revealed that seeking revenge for being bullied at school was a reason why gang members joined such organizations. According to one of the gang members interviewed, teachers are often not aware of what is happening in classrooms, and even if they are aware, they often do not do much in response. The same study indicates that discrimination between poor and rich students in schools often isolates and increases resentment among students whose parents are not so wealthy. When these students grow up, they often join gangs in order to overcome feelings of powerlessness and inferiority that began in school.¹⁸⁴

Little is known about Internet victimization and its relationship with youth, especially in regards to cyber-bullying in the Maldives. The tele-density of the population shows a rapid increase in mobile subscriptions, and the Maldives has more mobile phones than mainline phones, with text messaging and mobile-based Internet use popular among youth.¹⁸⁵ With easy access to, and ownership of smart cell-phones, cyber-bullying – harassment through e-mail, cell phones, text messages and defamatory websites – has become increasingly common among younger generations. Findings from the survey conducted for this report show that 15% of surveyed young people were sent offensive, nasty, threatening or pornographic messages on their mobile phones. Although the Internet has many positive benefits, it also poses threats by making illicit materials more freely available and by challenging social structures through widening the gap between generations.¹⁸⁶

Bullying and cyber-bullying affects adolescents and young people deeply. Research suggests that bullying can lead to a wide range of problems, including loss of self-esteem and feelings of shame and/or anxiety. Many will carry lifelong emotional scars, fall into depression or even take their own lives. Students may come to dislike school and become truant in order to avoid victimization, have concentration problems or learning difficulties, or face increased stress and serious psychological problems.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Asia Foundation and Maldives Institute for Psychological Services, Training and Research. 2012. "Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Malé." Colombo: The Asia Foundation. Available: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/GangViolenceReportFINAL.pdf> (last accessed on January 31, 2014).

¹⁸⁵ Department of National Planning. 2012. "Statistical Yearbook of Maldives - 2012." Malé: Department of National Planning, Government of the Maldives.

¹⁸⁶ Labont, R., Mohindra K. and T. Schrecker. 2011. "The Growing Impact of Globalization for Health and Public Health Practice." Annual Review of Public Health 2011; 32: 263–83.

¹⁸⁷ Reid, K. 1989. "Bullying and Persistent School Absenteeism." In Tattum, D. and D. Lane D. (Eds.) *Bullying in Schools*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books; Balding, J., Regis, D., Wise, A., Bish, D., and J. Muirden. 1996. "Bully Off: Young People Who Fear Going to School." Exeter: Schools Health Education Unit; Blaya, C. and C. Hayden. 2004. "Décrochages scolaires et absentéismes en France et en Angleterre." In D. Glasman and F. Oeuvarard (Eds.) *La déscolarisation*. Paris: La Dispute; Sharp, S. 1995. "How Much Does Bullying Hurt? The Effects of Bullying on the Personal Well-being and Educational Progress of Secondary Aged Students." *Educational and Child Psychology*, 12; Sharp, S. 1996. "Self Esteem, Response Style and Victimization: Possible Ways of Preventing Victimization Through Parenting and School Based Training Programmes." *School Psychology International*, 17; Smith, J., Twemlow, S. W., and D.W. Hoover. 1999. "Bullies, Victims and Bystanders: A Method of In-school Intervention and Possible Parental Contributions." *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 30, 29-37.

3.6 YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Youth are recognized as having the right to make informed and responsible decisions about issues that affect their lives, as acknowledged in the resolution on youth and adolescents adopted by the Commission on Population and Development (2012) and the Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration (2012).¹⁸⁸ The *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights* (2012) also highlight the importance of citizens – including youth – in policy making.¹⁸⁹

Globally and in the region, the relationship between youth civic engagement and positive development outcomes has been the subject of attention.¹⁹⁰ Studies show that youth who are engaged in their communities are less likely to use drugs and alcohol, to drop out of high school, or to be involved in criminal behavior. Furthermore, youth engagement is associated with fewer behavioral problems, improved academic performance, and lower rates of pregnancy and drug use.¹⁹¹ This recognition of youth as actors in civic life has led to the formulation of youth specific policies and the design and implementation of youth-focused programs in many countries around the world.¹⁹²

The Government of the Maldives has placed special emphasis on bringing young people into the fora of civic life. One of the salient features of the Maldives first youth policy, dating back to the early 1980s, is a focus on encouraging youth to participate more actively in development projects and activities of national interest. Promoting youth volunteerism has been a consistent theme of youth policy and programming since that time. Yet, there appears to be a resounding chorus among young people that there is no public space for them, nor is there real interest in their views and concerns, despite youth being increasingly more connected through social media. These issues are discussed below.

Youth Engagement with NGOs and CSOs

Independent youth-focused civil society organizations and active non-government organizations can play an important role in youth development and engagement. Research shows that positive youth development is related to the development of civic knowledge and skills at an early age.¹⁹³ Increased youth participation in civic activities also benefits

¹⁸⁸ United Nations (UN). 2014. "Framework of Actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014." Available: <http://icpdbeyond2014.org/about/view/29-global-review-report> (last accessed on February 20, 2014).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ For example: Ludden, A. B. 2011. "Engagement in School and Community Civic Activities in Rural Adolescents." *Journal of Youth Violence*, 40, 1254-1270; Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D. and D. Thomas. 2010. "Strengths-Based Programing for First Nations Youth in schools: Building Engagement through Healthy Relationships and Leadership skills." *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 8 (160), 160-173; and Pearrow, M.M. 2008. "A Critical Examination of an Urban-based Youth Empowerment Strategy: The Teen Empowerment Program." *Journal of Community Practice*, 16 (4), 509-525.

¹⁹¹ Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D. and D. Thomas. 2010. "Strengths-Based Programing for First Nations Youth in schools: Building Engagement through Healthy Relationships and Leadership skills." *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 8 (160), 160-173.

¹⁹² United Nations (UN). 2005. "World Youth Report: Young People Today, and in 2015." Pg.73-4 Available: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wyr05book.pdf> (last accessed on March 7, 2014).

¹⁹³ Lerner, R.M., Alberts, A.E. and D. L. Bobek. 2007. "Thriving Youth, Flourishing Civil Society – How Positive Youth Development Strengthens Democracy and Social Development." A Report for the Carl Bertelsmann-Prize, 2007. Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University. Available: http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xber/SID-1E41F40A-F4F5D67A/bst_engl/xcms_bst_dms_20913_20914_2.pdf

governments, families and societies as a whole by providing civic role models for other youth, whilst counteracting the immense potential social costs that can be created through the apathy, frustration and social exclusion of young people.¹⁹⁴

Only a handful of youth-focused organizations promote civic engagement in the Maldives, including: *Strength of Society*, which aims to create awareness of youth rights and related issues; *Utopian Culture*, which supports individuality, peace and unity; *Youth for Equality*, which promotes youth participation in the community and awareness of issues; *CARE Society* addresses the needs of the disabled, including youth, and; *The Vibe*, which focuses on adolescent and youth health, including healthy lifestyles, awareness of HIV/AIDS and STIs, and youth development and volunteerism. A small number of organizations and networks focus on larger thematic areas (e.g. emergency response, democracy building, conflict resolution, human rights work, cultural preservation, environmental activism), and within this work, they include and engage young people. Such organizations include *Journey*, which provides aftercare and peer support for recovering drug users; *Maldivians Against Drug Abuse*, a network of 16 associations working together to provide a national civil society approach to minimizing drug abuse; and *Society of Women Against Drugs*, which provides after care support for drug recovery. According to the NGO Capacity and Need Assessment conducted in 2011, the majority of Malé-based NGOs (whether youth-focused or not) are largely unaware of each other's activities and areas of focus; a sizable number are also not fully operational due to limited or irregular funding, do not implement activities consistently, and have only a few regular volunteers or active members.¹⁹⁵

In the Maldives, although registration for civil society organizations is easy, their sustainability is difficult due to a lack of support from the government, limited capacity, and a lack of continuous funding. Current donors for NGOs in the Maldives are mostly local private sector businesses and various local donors, although such opportunities for funding are limited. Informal networking between various NGOs exists, but there is limited collaboration on service provision.

Islamic charities are active within civil society in the Maldives, and offer services to communities, especially for the most disconnected and vulnerable on the islands. These charities, which rely on Zakat (almsgiving), provide an informal safety net in Muslim communities by, for example, helping poor families obtain textbooks, uniforms for their children, health services, and engaging communities and youth in Islamic studies programs. According to the ADB Maldives Country Report (2007), an average charity would collect a modest amount each year (e.g. Rf. 7.4 million in 2002), which is distributed based on eligibility determined by island chiefs. More than approximately 60,000 individuals receive benefits each year.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO). (n.d.). "Why Should Youth be Engaged in Policy-Making. Joining Forces with Young People." Available: http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/downloads/youthguide/part2_why.pdf

¹⁹⁵ Raajje Foundation. 2009. "NGO Capacity and Need Assessment." Malé: Raajje Foundation.

¹⁹⁶ Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2007. "Social Protection Index for Committed Poverty Reduction, Volume 16. Maldives Country Report."

Engagement in Civic and Political Life

Youth civic engagement has been described in terms of pro-social behaviors exhibited by youth through involvement in activities that provide benefit both to them and to the institutions to which they belong, such as local community-based, civil society and voluntary organizations.¹⁹⁷ Involvement in community-based service groups, school and non-school-based sport activities, arts and literary groups all represent identified indicators of civic engagement among youth.¹⁹⁸

Findings from the survey conducted for this report however show that only 1 in 10 respondents were members of voluntary organizations. This low level of participation is a missed opportunity given the large number of voluntary civil society organizations with extensive geographic coverage across all of the inhabited islands of the Maldives.¹⁹⁹ Problems that persist include:

- Although the right to vote and run for public office is guaranteed by the 2008 Constitution of the Maldives for anyone who is 18 years of age, few young people have an interest in politics. Findings from the field research show that 90% of young people surveyed do not participate in the country's political life. Reasons for this which were cited include disappointment and frustration with public institutions and the performance of elected and appointed officials, declining societal values and increasing mistrust and corruption in the country.
- In 2012, the Maldives experienced a decline in its political rights rating due to the forcible removal of democratically elected president Mohamed Nasheed, the violence perpetrated against him and his party, the suspension of the parliament's summer session, and the role of the military in facilitating these events.²⁰⁰ Consequently, in 2013, the Maldives scored poorly on some indices of freedom. The "Freedom in the World" index, which is a measure of political rights and civil liberties published by Freedom House, evaluated the Maldives as being only 'partly free.'²⁰¹ The "Worldwide Press Freedom Index" ranks the Maldives 103 out of 179 countries, just above Uganda.²⁰² This crackdown on political freedoms has affected young people's attitudes towards politics.
- A recent World Bank report addressing challenges and prospects for the education sector in the Maldives shows that Maldivian youth are not offered a comprehensive

¹⁹⁷ Lerner, R. M. 2004. "Liberty: Thriving and Civic Engagement Among America's Youth." Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

¹⁹⁸ For example, please see: Hauser, S.M. 2000. "Education, Ability, and Civic Engagement in the Contemporary United States." *Social Science Research*, 29, 556–582; Minkoff, D. C. 1997. "Producing Social Capital: National Social Movements and Civil Society." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40(5), 606–619; Youniss, J., Bales, S., Christmas-Best, V., Diversi, M., McLaughlin, M. and R. Silbereisen. 2002. "Youth Civic Engagement in the Twenty-first Century." *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 12, 121–148.

¹⁹⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2011. "Summary Report - Comprehensive Study of the Maldivian Civil Society." Male: UNDP in the Maldives and the Government of Maldives. Available: <http://homeaffairs.gov.mv/files/Summary-Comprehensive-Study-of-the-Maldivian-Civil-Society.pdf> (last accessed on February 17, 2014).

²⁰⁰ Freedom House. 2013. "Freedom in the World 2013. Democratic Breakthroughs in the Balance Selected Data From Freedom House's Annual Survey Of Political Rights And Civil Liberties."

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Reporters without Borders. 2013. "2013 World Press Freedom Index: Dashed Hopes after Spring." Available: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html> (last accessed on February 10, 2014).

school-based knowledge of democracy or democratic reform, nor are they provided with courses that focus on concepts such as personal freedoms, human rights, the political and civic responsibilities of individuals, participatory decision-making or non-violent conflict resolution.²⁰³

- Research has shown that youth report a greater likelihood of becoming involved if parents, teachers and community leaders value their participation.²⁰⁴ However, focus-group discussions conducted for this report in Mahabadhoo Island revealed that youth feel as if they are, *'left on their own,'* as there are no societal or institutional support mechanisms to support them. Focus-group discussions also indicate that youth lack opportunities outside of school settings, as well as encouragement from the community to *'step outside the box,'* and first and foremost, *'to be heard.'*²⁰⁵

Youth Engagement Through Social Media

Information and communications technologies and social media platforms and networks have played a huge role globally in increasing the voice of youth in civil, social and political life.²⁰⁶ Social media such as Facebook, YouTube and blogging sites have become a key part of the daily lives of millions of young people in Asia.²⁰⁷ Facebook has become one of the most common uses of the Internet in the Maldives, while Twitter and MySpace are also accessed regularly; for its part, Twitter is the 18th most accessed site in the Maldives.²⁰⁸

These online social networks and other cyberspace-based platforms have served to increase youth connectivity and have also increased the exposure of youth to the outside world.²⁰⁹ Young people have established Facebook pages and groups as a way to connect with and meet others from their own island communities, to foster civic association in the islands and to express and debate issues of cultural importance. There is also evidence of socio-political and rights-based activism on Facebook and Twitter. Maldivian youth have played an active role in bringing democracy to the Maldives, and they participated actively in the first election that followed the adoption of the new constitution in August 2008. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were used to mobilize young people, call for democratic elections and to share on-

²⁰³ World Bank. 2011. "Higher Education in the Maldives: An Evolving Seascape." South Asia Human Development Sector. Report No. 36. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

²⁰⁴ Camino, L. A. and S. Zeldin. 2002. "From periphery to center: Pathways for youth civic engagement in the day-to-day life of communities." *Applied Developmental Science*, 6, 213-220; Fogel, S. J. 2004. "Risks and Opportunities for Success: Perceptions of Urban Youths in a Distressed Community and Lessons for Adults." *Families in Society*, 3, 335-344; Jarrett, R. L., Sullivan, P. J. and N.D. Watkins. 2005. "Developing Social Capital Through Participation in Organized Youth Programs: Qualitative Insights From Three Programs." *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33, 41-55.

²⁰⁵ Information obtained in focus-group discussions held with youth in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll. Discussions held on January 11, 2014. Additional information was obtained in focus-group discussions with youth in Malé, as conducted by Piotr Pawlak, independent consultant for the World Bank, and in focus-group discussions in Maalhos and Dharavandoo, as conducted by Natasha Leite, independent consultant for UNICEF. For more information, please see: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2014. "Youth in the Maldives: Challenges and Recommendations." Draft. Malé: UNICEF (unpublished).

²⁰⁶ For example, please see: David, C. 2013. "ICTs in Political Engagement Among Youth in the Philippines." *International Communication Gazette*. April 2013, Vol. 75 Issue 3, Pg. 322-337.

²⁰⁷ Liou, C. 2013. "Using Social Media for the Prevention of Violence against Women. Lessons Learned From Social Media Communication Campaigns to Prevent Violence against Women in India, China and Viet Nam." Working Paper 6. Bangkok: Partners4Prevention

²⁰⁸ Information obtained from: www.alexa.com (accessed on January 10, 2014).

²⁰⁹ United Nations (UN). 2005. "World Youth Report: Young People Today, and in 2015." Pg.73-4 Available: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wyr05book.pdf> (last accessed on March 7, 2014).

the-ground reports, footage and photos of events in the country, and young women also sat at the front of these movements.²¹⁰

Youth Engagement in Sports

According to the survey conducted for this report, the most common extra-curricular activity in the Maldives is school-based sports teams. More than half of the 402 young people interviewed (58%) reported that they have participated in various school-based teams, 28% reported participation in environment or nature clubs, and 21% in activities related to literary associations. More than 1 out of 4 young people surveyed stated they had the opportunity to actively engage as school leaders, school captains, sports captains, and house captains. Participation however is based along gender lines. For instance, young men tend to partake in and excel in sports and physical activities, and young women tend to participate in art and humanities-related activities. According to the survey, 27% of young women, as compared with only 12% of young men, engaged in literary activities; young males (60%) engaged in sports much more than females (30%).

As for the engagement of youth in sports and physical activities, the highest percentage of participants was observed in Laamu (57%), followed by Haa Dhaalu (42%). In contrast, young people's participation in sports and physical activities was lowest in Malé (35%) and Addu (27%). Young people were most active in sports and physical activities between the ages of 15 to 19 years; 48% of surveyed individuals who participated in sports belonged to this age group. The proportion of young people participating in sports or physical activities declines to 33% in the 20-24 year old age group.

Focus-group discussions with youth in Malé and Mahibadhoo Island revealed that support structures and an environment of mentorship, encouragement and empowerment simply do not exist outside of school settings, and as result, many young people do not engage in sports or physical activities beyond school because they are '*not interested.*'

Overall, 53% of surveyed youth reported that they do not play a sport or take part in any extra-curricular physical activities in schools, and the number was even lower in terms of participation in sports and physical activities outside of school. Part of the problem, as revealed in discussions held with Parent Teachers Associations and young people themselves, is a mismatch in the quality and already limited availability of sporting facilities and types of sporting activities in schools, in comparison to those available outside of school settings. For instance, Malé has the most well developed sport facilities in the Maldives, but it is home to only 42% of the entire youth population in the country. Research points to the importance of increasing the availability of facilities as a means of promoting physical activity, particularly in minority and remote communities, where the availability of such resources is disproportionately limited. Yet, studies show that while availability is important,

²¹⁰ Fulu, E. 2013. "Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives." Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

additional characteristics for facilities should be considered when promoting their use for physical activity.²¹¹

Gendered attitudes and perceptions, cultural norms and social factors also affect young men and women's active participation in sports. For instance, the pressure and expectation for boys and young men to be competitive and excel, and for young women and girls to be well-behaved, may result in preventing such youth from seeking engagement; for young men and boys, a fear of "*not being good enough*," and for young women and girls the need to preserve their '*lady-like*' image are impeding factors. Focus-group discussions conducted for this report revealed that boys and girls feel that "*they are not good enough*" to participate in sports and physical activities.²¹² Young women in the focus-group discussions in Mahibadhoo Island also expressed frustration that in terms of recreational facilities, they are not provided with the same space as boys, and the very few limited spaces which they have are constantly taken over by their male peers.²¹³

To address the lack of access to sporting facilities, the Ministry of Human Resources, Youth and Sports undertook a project to develop youth centers throughout the country to cater to the various social and vocational needs of the youth population. The main objective of these centers was to provide facilities for youth development programs at the island level. However, in the development of facilities and services offered, consultation and input was not sought from young people and community members at large, and hence the centers suffer from a lack of local ownership. Services available at these youth centers are also limited to a few indoor games such as billiards, table tennis, chess and garlando. Furthermore, under the privatization policy of the government, the management and operation of those youth centers was outsourced to local private parties in the atolls. As a result, most youth centers are now running on a commercial basis, rather than as an initiative to target youth.

Young Women's Participation and Engagement

Numerous socio-economic, cultural and geographic factors limit youth in the Maldives from accessing and benefiting from existing or new opportunities for socio-economic, civic or political engagement. Gender is one such factor.

Almost all of the political parties in Maldives maintain Women's Wings (consisting of all women, with an elected president, vice president and a council), but there are major challenges in engaging young women to run for local council elections. For example, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament was 7% in 2013 (of 77 members, 5 were women).²¹⁴ At the local level, out of 1,091 local council members, 58 are women and

211 Ries, A.V., Gittelsohn, J., Voorhees, C.C., Roche, K.M., Clifton, K.J and N.M. Astone. 2008. "The Environment and Urban Adolescents' Use of Recreational Facilities for Physical Activity: a Qualitative Study." *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 2008 Sep-Oct; 23(1):43-50.

212 Information obtained in focus group discussions held with youth in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll. Discussions held on January 11, 2014.

213 Information obtained in focus group discussions held with youth in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll. Discussions held on January 11, 2014.

214 Please see the World Bank's online statistical database, available at: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/maldives>; and the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals Indicators, available at: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/data.aspx>

the majority of these are below the age of 35 years.²¹⁵ Women also account for only 28% of State Ministers and 8.9% of Deputy Ministers. In the Civil Service, over 52% of the total employees are female, but the majority are within the junior employment category.²¹⁶ Discussions with atoll and island council members in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll, revealed that most local councils are comprised of men only, and if a woman is elected, they almost always hold low-ranking administrative positions.²¹⁷

Recent developments, however, indicate a shift in the role that young women can play in the political life of the Maldives. Women led protests calling for new democratic elections, and hundreds of women marched across the capital on February 24, 2012, and later on March 6th, a group of women marched to the President's Office to deliver a set of letters requesting President Waheed's resignation, while others sat outside the office holding boards with slogans such as "Where is my vote?" and "Justice now." Even more women participated in a protest on International Women's Day.²¹⁸

Focus-group discussions conducted for this report in Mahibadhoo Island confirmed that young Maldivian women can be driven, ambitious and politically motivated; however, they must constantly navigate societal constraints in order to actively participate in socio-economic, civic and political developments, such as running for office. A young woman who was interviewed stated, "*the current socio-political establishment does not take my voices and aspirations into consideration,*" while others expressed feelings of political disinterest and disengagement.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ UN. 2012. Emerging Theme: Engaging Young Women And Men, Girls And Boys, To Advance Gender Equality Emerging Issues, Trends And New Approaches To Issues Affecting The Situation Of Women Or Equality Between Women And Men: A Political And Legislative Approach. Rozaina Adam, Member Of Parliament, Maldives. Interactive Expert Panel. United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Fifty-Sixth Session, 27 February – 9 March 2012; New York. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/panels/panel5-emerging-theme-Adam.pdf>

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Interview with Council President of the Alif Dhaal Atoll and Council Director of the Alif Dhaal Atoll. Interview held on January 11, 2014 in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll.

²¹⁸ Fulu, E. 2013. "Domestic Violence in Asia: Globalization, Gender and Islam in the Maldives." Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

²¹⁹ This is in relation to the current socio-political establishment on Mahibadhoo Island only. Information obtained in focus group discussions held with a group of young women ages 19-35 in Mahibadhoo, the capital island of Alif Dhaal Atoll. Discussions held on January 11, 2014.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

For some years, concern has grown with regard to the issues facing youth in the Maldives, mostly over the increase in gangs, drug use and violence. Findings presented in this report confirm that young Maldivians are indeed facing new challenges and serious risks as they transition into adulthood. Unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities, idleness, disconnectedness with family and community, as well as geographical isolation all contribute to this situation. Perhaps of greatest concern is the disenfranchisement and loss of hope felt by many youth today, coupled with a lack of encouragement from their families and communities to seek solutions and search for new opportunities. This is adversely impacting Maldivian youth, and will have a detrimental effect on the future of the nation.

Overall, the report finds the following:

- ***Thwarted expectations.*** Despite the spatial isolation of many Maldivians, youth today are better educated and more connected to the outside world than ever before. Social media in particular is exposing young people to new ideas and values. The country's graduation to middle-income status is leading young people to aspire to more expensive lifestyles and higher social status. Social norms and the perceptions among parents and communities, however, are holding young people back and limiting youth from pursuing new opportunities and pursuing their goals. This has led to the creation of a large cohort of disenfranchised youth.
- ***Physical isolation.*** The youth population is geographically dispersed. Over a quarter of the entire population resides in Malé, while some 200 other islands have less than 1,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, the physical isolation has added to the disconnect between Malé and the rest of the islands, leading to a limited trickling down of information and services to other localities. As a consequence, Maldives faces high costs of transportation and citizens experience difficulties with regard to mobility and accessing public services, thereby limiting opportunities for young people, particularly for females. The separation of married couples for long periods of time, when husbands leave the atolls to seek jobs, is another negative effect of geographic isolation.
- ***Labor market constraints.*** Youth unemployment is pronounced in the Maldives, particularly for women, although it is unclear whether the problem is one of demand or supply. On the one hand, young people lack the socio-emotional and other skills which are required in the job market, and schools are not equipping youth with such skills. On the other hand, the reservation wage appears to be high (young people

have high or unrealistic expectations in terms of acceptable jobs). Added to this reality are the perceptions and expectations of parents as to what constitutes acceptable employment and wages for their children, leading to limited support and encouragement for youth to be economically active. This in turn, results in a national challenge referred to in the Maldives as “youth voluntary unemployment.” In the atolls specifically, many young women are keen to work and earn a living, but lack opportunities due to cultural norms. For men, fishing and the tourism industry are the main sources of livelihoods, but many young men aspire to new types of employment.

- ***The health care system fails to meet the needs of youth.*** This is inherent for a number of reasons. First, health care is often curative rather than preventative; and secondly, the subject of sexual and reproductive health among youth, particularly unmarried youth, remains taboo and sensitive.
- ***Stresses on families and family breakdown.*** Divorce rates in Maldives are relatively high, as is the proportion of female-headed households. One problem is that Maldivian youth are often ill prepared for the duties and responsibilities of parenthood, even though social norms place a significant emphasis on childbearing – a marker of adulthood for women. A lack of suitable housing in urban spaces, and unemployment or underemployment, place further stresses on families. Family issues and family breakdown, as well as unemployment, drug use, the desire for protection and a need to belong and form brotherhood, are connected to youth gang membership.
- ***Gang participation and violence is a relatively new phenomenon but has been on the rise.*** Youth are joining gangs for a variety of reasons, including inactivity and apathy, unemployment, drug use, a desire for a sense of belonging, and the need for young men to prove their masculinity. Moreover, high levels of domestic violence, divorce and broken homes have led young people to look outside of traditional family structures for the support and protection that gangs can provide. A further problem is that people with drug or criminal offenses experience difficulties in reintegrating into society and finding jobs; access to counseling and rehabilitation services, especially for young people, is limited and inadequate. As such, young people with a criminal past are often left with few alternative options and end up reengaging in gang activity.

The report revealed the following **risk and protective factors** that influence the development of Maldivian youth as they transition into adulthood:

- **Family.** Family and relationships are especially important for youth in the Maldives, as they also provide customary and financial support. Conversely, lack of adult encouragement and support to continue education and search for employment, parental displays of negative attitudes and behaviors (including physical and emotional abuse by family members), the absence of parental guidance, and high rates of divorce and family break up negatively impact youth and their development.

- **Schools.** Engagement in schools protects youth against a number of negative behaviors, including drug and alcohol use and engaging in violence and unsafe sexual practices. Unfortunately, when schools do not provide quality services, or do not foster a healthy environment for youth – because they expose them to rigid, violent, and gender inequitable attitudes and behavior, corporal punishment, bullying, discrimination, harassment and other forms of violence – not only is their development hindered, but they are more likely to engage in negative behaviors.
- **Health.** The health sector can play a significant role in achieving positive outcomes for youth development. However, as the number of young people entering their reproductive years in the country is on the rise, youth continue to lack access to quality services, particularly in regard to sexual and reproductive health, and adolescents and youth are not provided with sufficient knowledge about preventative health, which places them at risk. As rates of drug use amongst Maldivian youth continue to rise, the nation also faces challenges in providing sufficient and appropriate rehabilitation and support services to these individuals.
- **Gender Norms.** While the Maldives ranks relatively high in terms of education and health, it scores poorly in political empowerment and economic opportunity for women, and high levels of gender-based violence are prevalent. In recent years, gender inequality appears to have worsened in the Maldives, and civil society groups have reported significantly increasing restrictions on women’s dress, mobility, autonomy, forms of employment, voice and their ability to make independent decisions.

In light of the challenges facing Maldivian youth, as well as the key factors which strongly impact their development, it is evident that action must be taken in order to not only secure their well-being, but also to ensure their full development into adulthood. As the nation’s single largest demographic today, these youth will be the nation’s leaders of tomorrow.

MOVING FORWARD – SHAPING A NEW FUTURE FOR YOUTH

Recommendations

Engaging youth to be productive and content members of society will first and foremost require a radical shift in the way that youth are perceived and valued by adults, policy makers and society-at-large. This is a long-term process that will require attitudinal, structural, and cultural change, whereby young people can build their capacity and are given the authority and agency to make decisions, implement change, and to be actors in their own lives and in the lives of others. In short, the Maldives needs to adopt a ***broad strategy of youth empowerment***.²²⁰

“Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions. Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others.”

– The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2006-2015

With this objective in mind, the report makes five recommendations, some which are long term and others that can be achieved in the short term. These are discussed in turn.

#1. Conducting a National Youth Campaign

A first priority for the government would be to reach out to the youth population, engage them, and send a strong message that they are central to the future of the country. Specific objectives of the **campaign** would be to: (a) start a national dialogue about the need to change perceptions and attitudes regarding youth challenges; (b) publicly commit the government to work with youth on their issues; (c) present a new vision of youth as productive assets and citizens in society; and (d) launch a platform for youth programming. Such a campaign could have captivating slogans such as “We Need YOUth” or “we care for YOUth,” with a view to reaching different segments of society, including parents and peer groups. An ICT monitoring tool would be established to assess progress and identify how attitudes are changing vis-à-vis the campaign.

The proposed campaign would be novel in its messaging, but would also be based on effective and tested mechanisms used to change attitudes, norms, and behaviors on issues including public health and safety, such as the “*LoveLife*” HIV prevention campaign in South Africa, “*100% Jeune*” - a youth targeted public health campaign in Cameroon, and the “*Truth Campaign*” - a youth-driven anti-smoking media campaign in the U.S.²²¹ The campaign would also involve more targeted activities such as campaigns in schools and universities, the use of radio programs to reach out to all islands, the use of positive role models, and social media campaigns.

²²⁰ For more information, please see: The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2006-2015. Available at: http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2006_Commonwealth_PAYE_Eng.pdf

²²¹ Truth Campaign (USA) had a 15% rise in the number of adolescents who agreed with negative statements about smoking, a 19.4% decline in smoking among 14–16 year olds, and an 8% decline among 16-18 year olds.

#2: Developing new spaces for youth programming and participation - YouthConnect

A second priority would be to develop spaces where young women and men can assemble to connect with others, discuss issues of importance to them, access relevant information and build networks and skills. These spaces would not necessarily entail the construction of new buildings or new locations, which could be costly, but rather would build upon existing youth centers and utilize or transform existing structures into youth spaces. Types of youth programs that could be developed and implemented in these spaces could include: (a) skills training, including socio-emotional skills required for employment; (b) public health education and support for youth; (c) parenting education programs; (d) ICT and basic computer training; (d) English language training; and (e) civic education and leadership. The centers would be linked to local governing bodies in order to ensure quality delivery of services within the centers, as well as adequate maintenance and support.

A number of World Bank-financed projects are examples of good practices in developing safe spaces for youth, such as the “North Caucasus Youth Empowerment and Security Project,” and “Georgia Youth Inclusion and Social Accountability.” Within the South Asia region, the state of West Bengal in India has invested in youth resource centers, which are youth friendly, non-threatening spaces – often led by youth themselves – where young people can meet, discuss social issues, develop skills and organize and implement collective actions.²²² For instance, the “Thoughtshop Foundation” in Kolkata has transformed traditional neighborhood clubs into youth resource centers. Others have used existing buildings, applying a youth participatory approach to make them more youth friendly and inclusive of both males and females.

“Social and emotional competence is the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. It includes self-awareness, control of impulsivity, working cooperatively, and caring about oneself and others. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence.” – Promoting Social and Emotional Learning (1997)

In the case of the Maldives, the immediate first steps would be to conduct a stock taking of existing youth centers and related initiatives in the Maldives, to identify other potential sites that could be developed into the proposed youth spaces, to identify lessons to date in implementing these centers, and to design new models based on international good practices.

#3: Supporting preventative health care for young women and men

²²² Information obtained from: Innovations in Civic Participation. (n.d.) “India.” Available: <http://www.icip.org/resource-library/icp-publications/global-youth-service-database/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia-2/india/>

A third priority is providing youth friendly health care services (see Box 9). Young people need health services that help them make sound choices, that are free of stigma and discrimination, and that take into account the differentiated needs of male and female patients. ***In the long term***, this implies, among other things, shifting from health care services that are curative, to those that are preventative. It also implies: (a) paying attention to the location of services; (b) ensuring confidentiality; (c) involving young people in the design and operation of health care provision; and (d) changing attitudes so that young people are treated with respect.

In the ***short term***, the report recommends that the Ministry of Health:

- Assess the potential of health and social workers located in the atolls, with the objective of strengthening and/or establishing protocols for working with youth clients, both women and men. Currently each atoll is served by at least one of these employees, but little is known about their capacity to serve their youth clientele.
- Design and roll out social media aimed at bridging knowledge gaps amongst youth and health issues, shifting societal norms vis-a-vis sexual and reproductive health services for young people, and reducing the stigma associated with accessing psychological health services.

Box 9. Lessons on Developing ‘Youth Friendly’ Health Services

In Designing Facilities

- Locate clinics where public transportation is available and close to places where young people gather, such as schools, markets, and community centers.
- To assure youth's privacy, set aside a separate space for their services, or, if that is not possible, set aside some hours just for youth, in the late afternoon and evening and on weekends. Within the space and times set aside for youth, create an atmosphere that is welcoming, youthful, informal, and culturally appropriate for *all* the youth using the services.

In Designing Services

- Involve young people in designing and running services. Youth may be more able than adults to accurately identify the needs of their peers and can propose appropriate ways to meet those needs. Train youth as peer educators.
- Offer youth free or low cost services.
- Ensure that counseling spaces are private and that others cannot overhear.
- Maintain adequate supplies and a wide variety of contraceptive methods.
- Whenever possible, provide contraception to young women without requiring a pelvic examination and blood tests.
- Welcome young men. Recruit and train male staff to meet the sexual health needs of young men.
- Welcome clients' partners, when they wish their partners to accompany them
- Inform youth about available services and assure them of confidentiality.

In Addressing Attitudes

- Treat young people as respectfully as adults. Avoid judging youth's behavior. Work to develop solid, mutually trusting relationships with them.
- Provide all staff with ongoing training in adolescent development, understanding young people's needs and concerns, and treating youth confidentially and respectfully. Staff may need assistance in recognizing and changing attitudes that pose barriers to youth.
- Encourage counselors to spend as much time as necessary with each adolescent client in order to address all of her/his concerns.

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4: Preparing young people for jobs

A fourth priority would be to better understand the dynamics of supply and demand for youth labor in the Maldives. According to report findings, very little is known about labor markets and the causes of high unemployment among youth, however, it is likely due to both unrealistic expectations among youth and a mismatch of skillsets. The report thus proposes the following:

- ***In the immediate term***, a “Training PLUS” type program (see Box 10), which involves (a) conducting a (low cost, rapid) Employer Skills Demand Survey;²²³ (b) based on the findings of the survey, developing and delivering a short-term (4-6 months) training program to build both socio-emotional and technical skills, as needed, for young people; and (c) establishing links, networks and internships for gainful employment. The Training PLUS approach has been tested in countries such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Jordan, Morocco, Nepal and South Sudan. Such a program should target young people who are neither studying nor employed. Similar skills training programs in East Asia have also yielded promising results. Samoa’s “*Opportunity for Vulnerable Poor Youth*” program, which provides informal and vocational training to unemployed young people, in order to increase their earning opportunities as well as their self-esteem, has been found to have increased beneficiaries’ employability. Similarly, the Philippines’ “*Working Youth Center*” has yielded positive results in terms of employability.

Box 10. What is Training PLUS?

It is comprised of a three stage process as follows:

1. **A Quick Employer Skills Demand Survey**, which entails: (a) identifying immediate skills needs of employers; (b) mobilizing high school graduates (youth in transition from high school to university) to enroll in training; and (c) developing a curriculum for training with input from potential employers.
2. **Training (4-6 months)**, which involves: (a) providing job skills training in addition to socio-emotional skills and life skills; and b) keeping employers engaged in the training.
3. **Support for Employment**, which involves: (a) building connections between future employers and trainees; (b) helping trainees with their resume and assisting them in their interviews; and (c) working with future employers to provide gainful employment and/or internships

Source: Compiled from the Adolescent Girls Initiative (Jordan, Haiti, Afghanistan, Laos, Nepal, Liberia, South Sudan), and report on promoting youth opportunities in Morocco (World Bank, June 2012).

- ***In the longer term***, the government needs to strengthen the school to work transition by: (a) reassessing curriculums and textbooks to establish continuity between graduates’ skills and labor market needs, and (b) broadening the scope of after school programs to include the preparation of students for universities and the job market. In the case of Training PLUS, as highlighted in the Toolkit for Youth at

²²³ In Tonga, the cost of the survey was \$US 20,000 (World Bank, personal communications).

Risk,²²⁴ the single most important skill demanded by private sector firms was found to be socio-emotional skills, which can be taught through the educational system. Lastly, looking to the future and following on examples from countries such as Colombia, Jamaica, Lebanon, and Pakistan, the government, together with the private sector, should look at developing entrepreneurship and innovation programs for youth using ICT (see Box 11).

#5 Implementing “Youth Score Cards” in schools

Finally, this report recommends piloting Youth Score Cards in the World Bank financed “*Enhancing Education Development in the Maldives*” Project. This is a low cost intervention that can show positive results in the **short term**.

Experience has proven that an effective way to engage young people is to connect them with things that are important to them, such as schools. A World Bank pilot program initiated in 2010, in the Ismailia governorate in Egypt, achieved this objective through “**Youth Score Cards,**” which through participatory methods allows young people and their parents to monitor the quality of local schools in order to create accountability among school management.²²⁵ Preliminary assessments of the project have been positive. Students and parents found the methodology to be participatory, transparent and

easy to understand, and moreover, they appreciated learning about and influencing the quality of education in schools. This methodology has been widely tested through different World Bank and international NGOs’ projects, within a variety of public services, and it has proven to be crucial for eliciting social and public accountability and participation, and in increasing the responsiveness of end users (students, parents, and others).²²⁶

Box 11. Creating an Ecosystem for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Lebanon

Lebanon is officially classified as an Upper Middle Income Country, but its economy lags behind that of other similar countries due to serious deficiencies in the labor market: youth unemployment is high (34%), and women account for only 24% of the work force.

In 2013, Lebanon initiated the World Bank financed **Mobile Internet Ecosystem Project** to open innovation and crowdsourcing mechanisms among the young population, spur innovation and entrepreneurship among youth, and to boost skills and talent creation among young people. Other objectives include enhancing the local talent pool’s skills to meet global standards of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) industry; and to increase ICT-enabled services and extend the use of ICT tools to traditionally competitive industries in Lebanon, which will in turn increase their competitiveness in international markets.

Components of the project include: (a) entrepreneurial skills and practical training; (b) an innovation forum for Lebanese actors to meet, coordinate, learn, and adopt the international knowledge and best practices that are currently missing in Lebanon; and (3) policy reforms.

²²⁴ Cunningham, W., Cohan, L.M., Naudeau, S. and L. McGinnis. 2008. “Supporting Youth at Risk, A Policy Toolkit for Middle Income Countries.” Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

²²⁵ For more information, please see: World Bank. (n.d.) “Social Accountability Case Examples: Education.” Available at: <https://saeguide.worldbank.org/sites/worldbank.org.saeguide/files/documents/Edu%20MENA%20Egypt.pdf>

²²⁶ Thindwa, J., Edgerton, J. and R. Forster. 2005. Community Based Performance Monitoring (CBPM): Empowering and Giving Voice to Local Communities. Washington, D.C: World Bank.

A Final Word on Approaches to Youth Programming

Research conducted for this report uncovered numerous youth initiatives led by the Government of the Maldives; however, there is almost no information on their nature or effectiveness. Interviewees often mentioned a youth program that began and ended within the span of a year or two, without a clear idea on (1) the factors that led to the closure of the program; and (2) the impact of the program, including limitations and challenges which were faced. Hence, moving forward, initiatives of youth programming require quality impact evaluations with gender disaggregated data, in order to understand effectiveness and results, as well as to inform future interventions and strategies. Such measures may prove costly, however, in the long term they reduce costs by ensuring that resources for youth are allocated to effective programs.

Finally, international experience has shown that the needs of youth are best met through inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration – as well as with public-private sector involvement. Many countries and states have established inter-agency youth structures, with the objective of planning, coordinating, monitoring and in some cases funding youth development interventions. Others have moved beyond coordination and are experimenting with an integrated services model for youth development – which involves establishing a collaborative arrangement between service providers (governmental, non-governmental and private sector) and the communities in which youth and their families live. This integrated model has the objectives of: (a) reforming the usually fragmented system of services and support for youth and their families; (b) providing an integrated and comprehensive range of services for youth and their families; (c) increasing community participation, ownership and control over local initiatives; and (d) increasing transparency. The Maldives should consider these types of institutional arrangements and integrative approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

Recommendation	Short Term Actions	Medium and Long Term Actions	Responsibility
<p><i>Conducting a National Youth Campaign.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a national youth campaign to prioritize issues of youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize yearly youth campaigns as a platform to assess programming in previous years. • Develop a monitoring tool to assess progress and identify how the campaign is changing attitudes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Ministry of Youth and Sports • Ministerial Coordination
<p><i>Developing new spaces for youth programming and participation - YouthConnect.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a stocktaking of existing youth centers and related initiatives in the Maldives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish YouthConnect spaces that provide skills training, public health education, and access to other important resources for youth. • Develop a participatory approach to engaging young people in the development of YouthConnect . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Ministry of Youth and Sports • Ministerial Coordination
<p><i>Supporting preventative health care for young women and men.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the potential of atoll-based health and social workers for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from the provision of healthcare services that are curative, to those which 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Ministry of Health and Gender • Ministerial coordination

	<p>better assisting young men and women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social media to bridge knowledge gaps amongst youth and health issues, and to positively shape norms regarding the use of sexual, reproductive and psychological health services. 	<p>are preventative in nature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen health care services for youth by paying attention to the location of services, ensuring confidentiality, involving young people in the design and operation of health care provision, and changing attitudes towards youth. 	<p>primarily with Ministry of Youth and Sports</p>
<p><i>Preparing young people for jobs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot a “Training PLUS” type program to deliver a market-aligned short-term training program, as well as to establish links between youth and potential employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy to strengthen the school to work transition, which includes strengthening education systems and after school programs. • Support public and private sector partnership to design innovative strategies for youth employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Ministry of Education • Ministerial coordination primarily with Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Tourism

<p><i>Implementing “Youth Score Cards” in schools.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapidly deploy a youth score cards program to enable young people and their parents to monitor the quality of local schools, and to develop accountability amongst school management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate an in-school monitoring tool to ensure continuous feedback from students and parents, actively engage students for quality enhancement, and to enable schools to effectively respond to student needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Ministry of Education • Ministerial coordination primarily with Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Tourism
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ANNEX 1. OTHER DATA SOURCES

- *2004*, In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women, which was a qualitative research study carried out by the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security, and included 6 FGD with men and women ages 15-49 in 3 age categories (15-20, 20-35, 35-49). Each group consisted of 8-10 participants. The research also included three FGDs in three hospitals with nurses and doctors, discussions with police were held, and three in-depth interviews with survivors of GBV were conducted.
- *2005*, A Policy Report on Maldivian Teachers Attitudes to Their Own Profession, involved a total of 11 schools, including small island community schools, atoll schools, atoll education centers and schools on the capital island, and a total of 104 participants were interviewed, including 79 teachers, 13 supervisors, 3 VSO teachers and 9 head teachers.
- *2011*, Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behavior of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives study, which included FGDs and in-depth interviews with women of reproductive age above 18. A total of 3 FGDs were conducted, consisting of 27 participants, including a youth group of eight participants between the ages of 18 and 22 (FGD-1), a mixture of 10 young and older participants ranging between 19 and 48 (FGD-2), the majority of whom were in their twenties and thirties; and an older group of nine participants between 44 and 62 years (FGD-3).
- *2012*, ICPD BEYOND 2014 Maldives Operational Review included 19 stakeholder meetings and in-depth interviews, as well as FGDs in 13 islands with members of the community, including migrants, vulnerable people including single mothers, the elderly and youth. 27 officials were consulted from line ministries, consultations were held with 4 key figures from the community, and FGDs were conducted with 200 individuals.
- *2012*, Workshop, part of the Maldives Country Review for the ICPD 2014 Survey, included 20 participants. Youth and adults representing various NGOs in the Maldives and representatives from the stakeholder ministries and institutions took part in the workshop.
- *2012*, ICPD+20 Review, which included FGDs at Hdh. Kulhudhufushi, Hdh. Neykurendhoo, Hdh. Kurinbee, Hdh. Nolvivaram and Hdh. Nolvivaramfaru in Haa Dhaal Atoll as part of the review process, and included interviews with youth and adult participants representing the education sector, health sector, island councils, women's development committees, youth development committees, NGO's and residents of the island. An average of 15 participants joined the discussion from each island.

In addition, the following Maldives-specific surveys, statistics, reports and publications were reviewed

- *2005*, Emergency Preparedness and Response Health Sector Plan (draft) (Ministry of Health)

- 2006, Population and Housing Census 2006 (Ministry of Planning and National Development)
- 2007, Maldives: Gender and Development Assessment conducted by the Asian Development Bank
- 2009, Internationally Recognized Core Labor Standards In The Maldives - Review Of The Trade Policies Of Maldives (International Trade Union Confederation)
- 2009, Global School-based Student Health Survey (Ministry of Education, Centre for Disease Control, and WHO)
- 2009, Maldivian Demographic and Health Survey 2009 (Ministry of Health and Family)
- 2010, U.S. Department of State's 2010 Human Rights Report - Maldives (U.S. Department of State)
- 2010, Activities Addressing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives 2010)
- 2011, Comprehensive Study of the Maldivian Civil Society (UNDP and the Government of Maldives)
- 2011, Maternal Health, Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Rapid Situation Assessment of the Maldives (Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women)
- 2011, Maldives Statistical Yearbook 2011 (Department of National Planning)

ANNEX 2. CURSORY SCAN OF YOUTH POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN THE MALDIVES

Youth Policy (2003) (only available in the Dhivehi language)

The Maldivian Government, in an attempt to address the issues faced by the youth, issued the “Youth Policy 2003.” Since then, the Maldives has gone through significant changes, such as the enactment of a new constitution in 2008, the creation of political parties, and the first multi-party election in 2008. Further, the report found that a number of structural changes may have had an impact on youth since then, including the general presence of an increasing youth population, increased engagement of young people in various areas, an increase in drug use and peddling, and involvement in serious and organized crimes, traffic violations and gang activities. However the country still lacks appropriate legislation related to youth.

With the majority of the population belonging to youth groups, special emphasis is given by the government to youth development. The National Youth Council (NYC) was created in 1980 to coordinate and advise on youth activities, and to plan and implement youth development programs. NYC acts as an advisory body to the Minister of Human Resources, Youth and Sports. NYC membership is by appointment by the Minister. It is the national coordinating body for youth affairs, advising the Minister in collaboration with the Youth Department, YHC and other concerned organs of MHRYS. Its main functions are the following:

- Advocate active youth citizenry- engagement, leadership and voice for issues through programming, resources, funding and recognition.
- Connect the youth sector for increased youth outreach, through creating opportunities and access, both local and overseas.
- Enable the development of youth and the youth sector, through training and capacity building.

NYC advises the Minister on Youth Day activities, the National Youth Awards, the Youth Challenge and the Youth conference, and is the liaison body with the Commonwealth Youth Caucus and other international partners. NYC advises the Minister on ways to strengthen and support the programs and activities of youth clubs, associations and NGOs. NYC stresses that MHRYS focus on youth friendly services, as well as harmonizing and prioritizing youth participation and voice at sectoral level discussions. NYC advises on compiling a National Youth Policy and Youth Act. NYC liaises with the UNFPA, UNICEF and other multilateral bodies.

Civic Engagement

Youth Centers and Youth Health Café

To address the lack of access to sporting facilities in the islands, the Ministry of Human Resources, Youth and Sports undertook a project to develop youth centers in the atolls. Youth centers have been established throughout the country during the last two decades to cater to the various social and vocational needs of the youth population. The main objective of these centers is to provide facilities for youth development programs at the island level. The Youth Health Café (YHC), established in Malé under the Ministry of Human Resources, Youth and Sports (MHRYS), has provided skills training programs, awareness programs on sexual, reproductive and mental health issues, and has fostered youth volunteerism. Additionally, the Youth Health Café has facilitated youth career guidance programs, different outreach programs in several thematic areas, and offers counseling services for youth. Currently however, this is countered by a lack of support at policymaking levels within the Ministry of Youth and Sports, leading to slow progress in addressing youth health issues, insufficient human resources, few training opportunities, and an inadequate allocation of funding.

Further, under the privatization policy of the government, the management and operation of those youth centers was outsourced to local private parties in the atolls. However, in the development of facilities and services at the youth centers, they have not consulted or sought contribution from young people and community members at large. As a result, in some islands, youth centers are running more on a commercial basis than as youth target initiatives. The services available at these youth centers are limited to few indoor games such as billiards, table tennis, chess and garlando. The existing youth centers do not have youth ownership and fail to serve as community connectors.

Employment

Program Example: Technical and Vocational Education Programme (TVET)

To address the critical issue of inadequate employment opportunities for youth, the government established the Technical and Vocational Education Programme (TVET) in 2005. The main objective of TVET is to create a skilled workforce to meet labor market demands. Since its inception, the program has been diversified to offer trainings on hospitality and tourism, construction and building, agriculture, electrical wiring and engineering and handicrafts. As of 2010, a total of 1,351 people had graduated from TVET and an additional 4,767 students were being trained through 82 training providers.

Health

Youth Reproductive Health

- Population Policy identifies Goal 14: “Provide population education to children, adolescents and adults.”
- ICPD+10 and Beyond: Progress, Achievements and Challenges in the Maldives (1994-2004) identifies priority actions that include “[a]ddressing the needs of youth through

- the provision of information and services, promoting responsible behaviour through strengthening life skills education in schools and out of school youth and carrying out awareness campaigns through media on issues of drug use, unsafe sex, gender based violence etc. and their implications.”*
- National Reproductive Health Strategy 2005-2007 identifies adolescent sexual and reproductive health as a thematic area, with the goal to *“improve the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents (10-19) and young people (15-24) in the Maldives.”*²²⁷
 - 7th National Development Plan 2006-2010 identifies the need to promote awareness of RH among adolescents.
 - Health Master Plan 1996-2005 reports that ‘adolescent health’ has only been addressed within the framework of maternal and child health, and has not been differentiated as a focus area within the health sector... The plan contains reports of premarital sexual activity, unsafe sexual practices, and unsafe abortion among adolescents, but restricts strategies to raising awareness on SH needs in schools.²²⁸
 - SH policies continue to consistently reflect commitment to promoting awareness despite persistent reports and research findings showing the need for services to deal with STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and unsafe abortions. Similarly, there are numerous strategies targeting HIV/AIDS, despite low incidence and high levels of knowledge of HIV/AIDS, and low knowledge of other STIs. For instance, National Youth Policy notes youth health as one of 9 key issues: [Unofficial translation as offered in Hameed, 2011] *“The most serious issues affecting the health of young men and women are because of their habits and lifestyles. Low consumption of healthy food, smoking, and drug abuse may be noted in particular. Also the importance of family planning.”*²²⁹

Abortion

Abortion is criminalized in the Maldives, although the practice is permitted in the case of pregnancies where the fetus is diagnosed with thalassemia.

Drug and Substance Abuse

In light of the high prevalence of drug use among youth in the Maldives and the early age of initiation and first injection, the Government of Maldives launched a one of its kind policy. The new Drug Act 17/2011 launched in by the Government of Maldives has been a major milestone for addressing drug abuse in the country. The law clearly has a provision for treating drug users, rather than simply promoting incarceration. Under this act, the National

²²⁷ The strategy also identifies the following objectives: (1) 50% of adolescents and youth (10-24 years) have access to age appropriate information related to SRH, (2) ASRH Life Skills Education provided to at least 75% of adolescents/young people in selected schools in Malé, (3) Develop and pilot youth-friendly services on SRH” (P.13)

²²⁸ Quoted from Hameed, S. 2012. “Sexual Health Policies and Youth: A Case Study of the Maldives.” Thesis submitted to the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, June 2012. London School of Economics and Political Science.

²²⁹ Among the strategies: (1) Promote awareness about HIV/AIDS and other STIs, (2) Promote awareness about nutrition, family planning, and early marriage.

Drug Agency has been mandated as the lead agency dealing with all issues related to drug prevention, harm reduction and treatment.²³⁰

Other Health-related Information

There is a complete lack of national policy, nor is there any form of legislation on occupational health and safety. There is no national legislation to protect health and safety of the workers. The National Employment Act refers only to the notification of work-related injuries requiring medical attention. There is no provision for punitive action for non-compliance.

Youth with Disabilities

Action Plan for Children with Disabilities (2008 – 2013) includes provisions addressing youth with disabilities. For instance, to tackle the issue of employment for youth with disabilities (Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Draft National Policy on Disability, Goal 8 of the 7th National Development Plan – Social Security, strategy 3.1.) the policy calls on the following actions to be undertaken within the framework:

- Development of vocational education training schemes for students graduating from Special Education Needs (SEN) units, which could be done by expanding existing mechanisms for vocational training within the Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security to include a mandatory intake of youths with disabilities.
- Advocacy efforts by the Ministry of Gender and Family for the Civil Service Commission to consider starting a traineeship program for youths with disabilities, in order to train them to work within government Ministries.

To address issues related to access to sports and social activities for youth with disabilities (Article 7, 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Draft National Policy on Disability. Goal 4 of 7th National Development Plan – Leisure and Recreation, policies 1 and 2, Goal 2 of 7th National Development Plan – Sports, policies 3.2/4.2.), it suggests the basic target of one major sporting event to be held and televised for children or youths with disabilities by the end of 2010. Further it recommends the following actions to be undertaken:

- The Ministry of Youth and Sports will work with the Ministry of Education to provide sporting and social opportunities for the students attending SEN units.
- Mentoring programs will be introduced in association with either guides/scouts or with Youth Empowerment projects. These will be extended to include social clubs for children and youths with disabilities and holding sporting events for children with disabilities alongside other major sporting events.
- The ministry responsible for gender supports any groups of children or youths with

²³⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2013. "National Drug Use Survey. Maldives - 2011/2012." Malé: UNODC.

disabilities by providing information and materials in accessible formats.

Violence and Crime

Gender-Based Violence

Legislation does not exist to protect young women, or all women for that matter, from sexual harassment in the workplace, custodial violence and elderly abuse in the Maldives. Rape, when it occurs within the marital context, is not a criminal offense. Legislative frameworks in the Maldives currently enable, to varying degrees, the prosecution of *zina* crimes pertaining to extra-marital sexual relations. Penalties for such crimes may include public lashings, which are typically considered inhumane by the international community. Maldives should move immediately towards abolishing laws pertaining to *zina*, which disproportionately harm women. Inheritance law in the Maldives is inherently based upon *Sharia* law, and does not enable women to acquire shares of inheritance equal to male heirs. Such discriminatory inheritance law has harmful economic implications for women, and must be critically assessed and reformed.

Existing laws and policies which seek to address various types of violence against women and girls, as well as men and boys, have several inherent shortcomings. Such laws are not age specific, and they generally do not take into consideration different stages of the life cycle. Existing protocols and mechanisms to deal with issues of domestic violence, including the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, have yet to be fully implemented. The Child Sex Abuse Act (2009) does not recognize, for instance, sexual offences perpetrated by an adult who is legally married to a child under *Sharia* as a crime. Further, the Sexual Harassment Bill has been drafted but not passed.

Corporal Punishment (Selection from the “The Maldives –Country Report,” Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2013)

Corporal punishment is lawful in the home. There is no legal defense for its use by parents in the Penal Code 1968 (amended 2002), but legal provisions against violence and abuse are not interpreted as prohibiting corporal punishment of children. In information provided to the Human Rights Committee in 2012, the Government asserted that the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child 1991 “prohibits corporal punishment in homes, schools and the penal system of any person under the age of 18” (5 July 2012, CCPR/C/MDV/Q/1/Add.1, Written replies to the Human Rights Committee, para. 73). In fact, article 18 of the Law prohibits only punishment of a degree which is considered to harm the child: “No child shall, even as a measure of discipline, be subjected to punishment which may cause physical injury or which may be detrimental to the health of the child.” Furthermore, at the same time as stating that all corporal punishment is prohibited the Government confirmed that it had “identified the actions and measures to prohibit all corporal punishment in all settings including law reform and an anti-corporal punishment campaign is planned for 2013” (5 July 2012, CCPR/C/MDV/Q/1/Add.1, Written replies to the Human Rights Committee, para. 74).

There is no explicit prohibition of all corporal punishment in schools. Article 10 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child 1991 states that punishment in school “must be appropriate to the age of the child and should not be physically or psychologically harmful to the child”. The Ministry of Education has stated that corporal punishment should not be used, but the draft Penal Code introduces a legal defence for the use of corporal punishment by teachers (see under “Home”). An Education Bill has been under discussion since 2009: it was reviewed by the Committee on National Development in October 2012 and recommendations for further amendments were made but we have no detailed information on the proposed provisions.

Corporal punishment is lawful in alternative care settings. The draft Penal Code would provide a legal defence for the use of force to punish children in institutions and other care settings. In 2010 regulations for children’s homes were being drafted which would reportedly prohibit corporal punishment (National action plan to prohibit all corporal punishment, SAIEVAC workshop on Legal Reform and Corporal Punishment, November 2010, Kathmandu).

Education

- Concerned with the quality of school teachers as being central to the improvement of education in the Maldives, the Ministry of Education introduced a policy initiative for the establishment of a sound quality assurance framework for the national school system.²³¹ The MOE has developed a quality assurance mechanism, which now needs to be pilot tested, refined and scaled up throughout the country. The government established pre-service teacher education that is offered by several institutions in the Maldives, including the Faculty of Education and the Centre for Open Learning of the Maldives National University, as well as in private higher education institutions such as Mandhu College and Villa College. The number of teachers graduating from these institutions, however, is too low to meet the needs of the national education system.²³²
- Further, the government has established a professional development policy for teachers. The professional hubs for teacher development in the Maldives are the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at the central level, and the Teacher Resource Centers (TRCs) at regional levels, respectively. In-service teacher training is aimed at the following categories of teachers: (a) unqualified teachers (mainly certification courses); (b) teachers requiring skills upgrading; (c) teachers needing preparation for new roles, such as teacher educators or principals; and (d) curriculum related training, particularly when there are curriculum changes in the education system or when teachers require refresher courses. The in-service teacher training programs are mainly off-site programs, delivered through the TRCs or in Malé (off-

²³¹ Osorio, C. G. and D.E. Fonseka. 2013. “Maldives Development Update.” Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Available: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/10/18612521/maldives-development-update> (last accessed January 22, 2014).

²³² Ibid.

site in-service teacher training is known to have limited impact internationally).²³³

- In order to improve teachers' motivation and performance, a hardship allowance was introduced in 2005 in order to promote local teachers in the atolls. This incentive encouraged some local teachers and principals to work in schools in remote atolls.
- While a conceptual framework for quality assurance in the Maldives has been prepared, it has not been implemented effectively. A comprehensive tool kit for the evaluation of school performance was developed, which is intended to facilitate the assessment of educational processes by schools, self-assessment, provincial and national level authorities, and by external assessments.
- Another policy worth considering is the Professional Development Policy, which is intended to offer extra training and aid for employees working in the field of education. The policy is available at:
<http://www.cce.edu.mv/uploads/CCE/policies/Professional%20Development%20Policy%20of%20Education.pdf>.

Gender

The Ministry of Health and Gender oversees the institutional mechanism for the advancement of women in the Maldives. Traditional gender roles continue to exist in the Maldives and hinder women and men from fully enjoying the benefits of a gender equitable society. Gender sensitization work is consistently carried out by the Ministry of Health and Gender at various levels and through different mediums, including media advocacy and social interaction.

- The Maldives ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in July 1993.
- The Maldives has also acceded to the Optional Protocol of CEDAW on March 13, 2006.
- The Maldives is party to the Beijing Platform for Action, the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, the SAARC Plan of Action on the Girl Child, and the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

A Gender Management System based on the Commonwealth model was put in place in 2001 under the government policy of gender mainstreaming. The basic structures for this system are in place, with the establishment of a Gender Equality Council in December 2001, and the appointment of focal points in all sectors. Work continues in regard to strengthening the system through capacity building and advocacy. The Seventh National Development

²³³ Harris, D., and T. Sass. 2011. "Teacher Training, Teacher Quality, and Student Achievement." *Journal of Public Economics*. 95: 798-812.

Plan reaffirms gender mainstreaming as a priority and incorporates gender as a cross-cutting issue.

The National Policy on Gender has been formulated, and it came into effect on April 5, 2006. The following steps have been taken to establish gender equity and equality in the Maldives:

- Gender mainstreaming for the effective inclusion of gender concerns in all policies, programs and projects.
- Empowerment of women to ensure the participation of women in the political, social and economic spheres.
- Advocacy and gender sensitization.
- Combating gender-based violence.
- Implementation of CEDAW.
- Collecting sex-disaggregated data, and analyzing this data from a gender perspective.
- Legal review and reform with a focus on gender in the criminal justice system.
- Establishing a decentralized social protection service for women.

Protecting Rights of Children Framework

Policies and activities carried out to protect the rights of children include:

- The signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on August 21, 1990 (the Convention was ratified on February 11, 1991 and two optional protocols to the Convention were ratified by the Maldives on May 10, 2002).
- Designing and commemoration of the Year of the Maldivian Child in 1991.
- Convening of the National Conference on Children in 1991.
- The enactment in 1991 of a law entitled the Protection of the Rights of Children.
- The preparation of a National Plan of Action based on the Declaration and the goals set for the 1990s by the World Summit for Children.
- The establishment in 1992 of a National Council consisting of senior representatives of Government Ministries and civil society to provide policy directions and guidance in the monitoring and implementation of the provisions of the law on the Rights of the Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The establishment in 1992 of a Unit for the Rights of Children (URC) to monitor the implementation of the provisions of the Law on the Rights of Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The URC is also responsible for providing counselling services to children and families, extending technical support to rehabilitation efforts at institutions for children in difficult circumstances and collecting data regarding vulnerable children.
- On the Maldives initiative, SAARC member countries formulated a SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia. The Convention was adopted during the 11th SAARC Summit.
- Developments in the area of juvenile justice include the establishment of a Juvenile Court on August 1, 1997, and the establishment of the Family and Child Protection Unit (FCPU) at the Police Headquarters. The URC, the FCPU and the Juvenile Court continue to build a multi-disciplinary approach to juvenile delinquency at island and atoll levels, and they strive to mainstream child protection through the inclusion of child protection awareness by training island/atoll leaders.
- Some national laws have been reviewed and amended in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These include regulations in relation to juvenile justice that have been amended to restrict criminal proceedings against children in favor of rehabilitation, and the rules and regulations related to the employment of children.
- A family law was enacted in 2000 and came into effect in July 2001.
- Additional mechanisms are being piloted since December 2000 to strengthen child protection nation- wide.
- A special website of the URC was launched on May 10, 2001.
- A National Plan of Action (NPA) towards the wellbeing of children in the Maldives for the decade 2001-2010 was prepared through a consultative process with participation by stakeholders, including children. The NPA was based on the recommendations outlined by a 2002 UN General Assembly report “A World Fit for Children.”

Future priorities to strengthen child protection measures in the Maldives include:

- Reviewing the existing Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children.
- Assessing the situation of children regularly, to identify and target services for vulnerable groups.
- Further training of child protection workers in all the islands, who assist children in difficult circumstances.
- Conduct situational analysis for all atolls, through island-level consultations, to evaluate the needs of the community prior to the establishment of the Child Protection System.
- Create awareness on child protection issues through the media and print material.
- Develop clear and standard procedures and protocols in consultation with all stakeholders, in working towards the protection of children in vulnerable situations.
- Establish a decentralized National Child Protection System.
- A National Conference on Strengthening the Family was held in 1995. The Conference endorsed a Plan of Action, the implementation of which is underway.
- A Family Law had been enacted and came into force in July 2001.
- The International Day of Families is marked in the Maldives on May 15 of every year.
- Drafting a Family Policy.

New developments in the area of child protection include:

- Since the beginning of the year 2006, the Ministry of Gender and Family has integrated its service provision to women, children and families. Hence the URC, established in 1992, has been renamed, and a Child and Family Protection Authority has been established to oversee the rights of the child, women and the policies and legislation related to families.
- Protection services, including counseling and social work, are now being provided by Child and Family Protection Services. The Family and Community Development section undertakes the implementation of international instruments such as the CEDAW, CRC, Commonwealth Plan of Action, Sanya Declaration and others, including related advocacy. The Planning, Monitoring and Research Section undertakes research with regard to children, women and families, and monitors and reports on the implementation of these instruments in addition to policy planning and implementation.
- Similarly, a project was undertaken to establish Social Protection Services Centers, in order to provide decentralized social services for children, women and families in the atolls.